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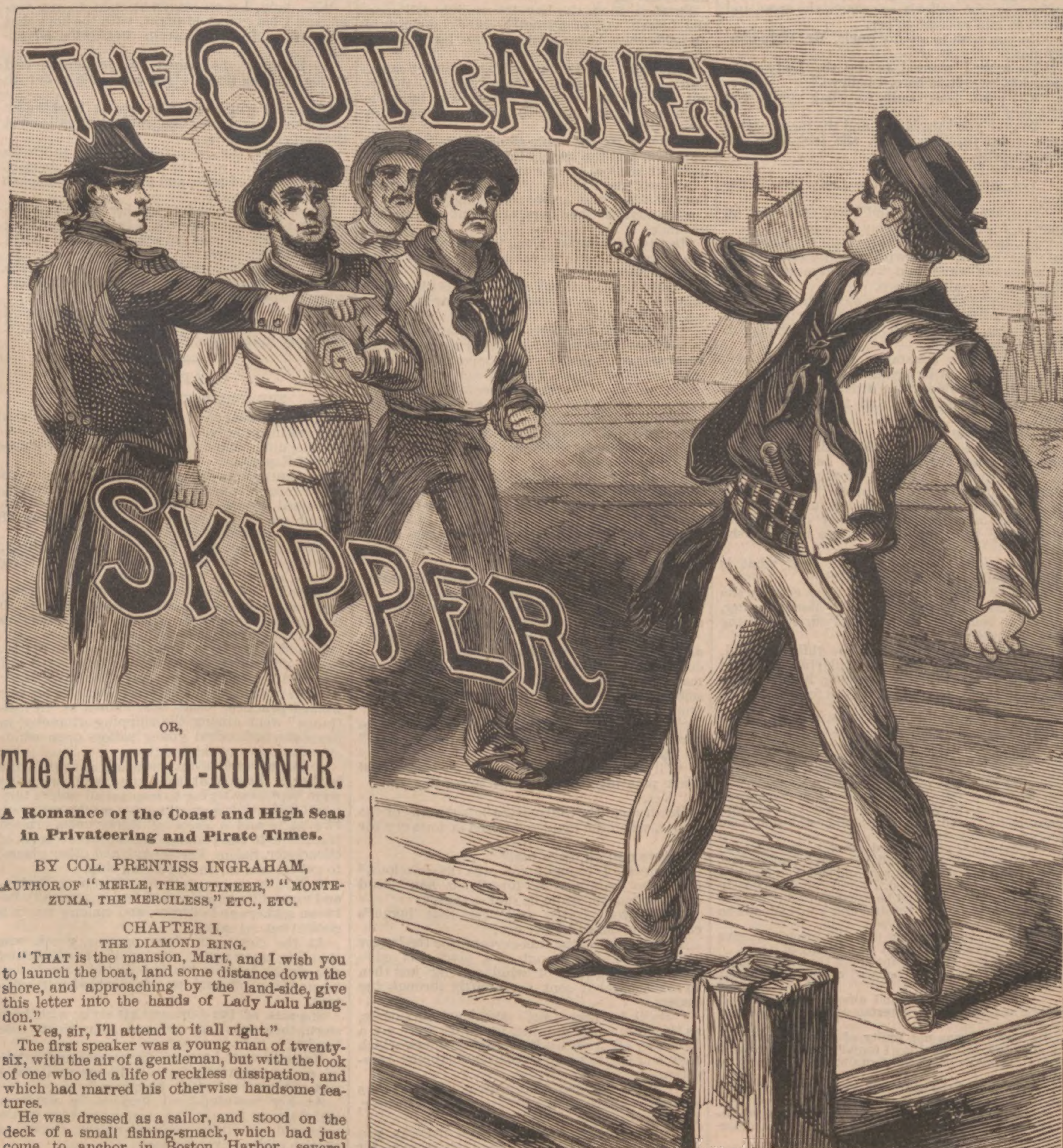
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OR,

The GANTLET-RUNNER.

A Romance of the Coast and High Seas
in Privateering and Pirate Times.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DIAMOND RING.

"THAT is the mansion, Mart, and I wish you to launch the boat, land some distance down the shore, and approaching by the land-side, give this letter into the hands of Lady Lulu Langdon."

"Yes, sir, I'll attend to it all right."

The first speaker was a young man of twenty-six, with the air of a gentleman, but with the look of one who led a life of reckless dissipation, and which had marred his otherwise handsome features.

He was dressed as a sailor, and stood on the deck of a small fishing-smack, which had just come to anchor in Boston Harbor, several cable's-lengths off from the shore, which was

"BACK, ALL OF YOU, FOR I AM NO SLAVE TO BE SEIZED AND IMPRISONED ON A KING'S SHIP!"

there dotted with handsome residences, the houses of the wealthy colonial citizens, for my story opens amid scenes of the past century.

The one he addressed was an ordinary sailor, and besides these two, there were on the little vessel a bronzed-faced fisherman and a boy, seated in the cockpit, while in the cabin, as though to keep out of sight, were a couple of men in sailor's dress.

"It is a handsome place," said the young man, as he glanced at the mansion, which was a grand old structure, surrounded by ornamental grounds running down to the water's edge.

"Oh, yes, cap'n, I calkerlates that are ther finest house in these parts, and Mister Rupert Wyndom has got the riches ter keep it, too, for he's got a mint o' money they tells me," said the fisherman, to whom the remark was addressed.

The young man made no reply, but eyed the mansion through his glass for awhile, and then turned his gaze upon the sailor who had rowed ashore in the smack's boat.

The little vessel had run into the harbor from seaward and dropped anchor only a short while before, and was one of the class of craft known as fishing-smacks, with nothing about her to attract attention, unless it was that she was more trim in build, perhaps, than most of her class.

Watching Mart as he rowed shoreward, the young man saw him land at a point where a lane ran down to the shore, and soon after beheld him enter the arched gateway of the mansion.

Lying in a ship's hammock, swung between two large trees, was a maiden, a book in hand, and seeing the sailor's approach, she arose and called to him to come to her.

"Do you wish to see my uncle, Mr. Wyndom, my man?"

"No, miss, I wanted to see the Lady Lulu Langdon, who lives here, I believe."

"Ah! I am Lady Lulu, so what would you wish me?"

"To give you this, lady," and the man handed her a sealed package, which she took with evident surprise.

"For me?"

"Yes, lady, if you are the Lady Lulu Langdon."

"I am she; but wait, and I will give you an answer, for doubtless a reply is desired."

"No, lady; I was simply told to place that in your hands," and with a polite salute, such as a man-of-war's man would give an officer, Mart hastily walked away.

For a moment the maiden stood gazing at the package, which had her name, and printed with a quill pen, rather than written, as though to disguise the writing.

The seal bore the stamp of an anchor only, and realizing that by breaking it alone she could discover the mystery, she at last did so, and instantly her face flushed and then paled, as she said:

"His writing!"

A moment she stood undecided, and then she hastened after the sailor; but he had already left the grounds, and going to the arched gateway she glanced down the broad highway leading into the town, which was not far distant.

But the man had mysteriously disappeared, and going to a seat under a tree near by, she said:

"How dare he write to me? And what is this he sends? Oh! how beautiful!"

She had opened a small morocco case, as she spoke, and there was revealed a diamond ring, the stone being of great size and purity, and the setting massive.

"This is an insult to send me this," she said, as she gazed upon the beautiful ring, and then she turned to the accompanying letter, which she read aloud, and which was as follows:

"AT SEA, Monday, 17—

"Do not start, Lady Lulu, upon recognizing the writing of your old friend Randolph, because it comes from him in his bitter sorrow and disgrace; but read through to the end, and then judge me as you hope some day to be judged, with mercy."

"Since you were a wee little girl at your proud father's home of Arleigh Castle, and I a midshipman, I have loved you, Lady Lulu, and that love but grew with years."

"I was wild, perhaps, led away by my elders to gamble, and dissipate, and yet, when I again met you, after long service at sea, and saw you budding into beautiful womanhood, I loved you more dearly and vowed to reform and be worthy of you."

"I told you of my resolve, and you bade me be brave and do right, and hope."

"Was I wrong in taking that as a promise to give me your love some day, if I was worthy of it?"

"I think not, and I meant to win the prize I aimed for, and my whole life became changed from that day."

"But I had enemies, and among my brother officers, and they were determined to crush me, and they did."

"Charges I was not guilty of were brought up against me, and one day I found myself dismissed from the navy of Great Britain, and sent forth in disgrace."

"I knew that the sad news went only too quickly to you, and so I became a wanderer."

"But, though cast off in disgrace, I was not discouraged, but, securing a vessel of my own, determined to conquer success."

"In going to England I learned that your father had sent you to visit your mother's brother in

America, and visiting the port of Boston on business, I take this opportunity to write to you, Lady Lulu, asking that you accept the accompanying souvenir and wear it for my sake."

"As I must also sail during the night, and I beg that you will grant me an interview."

"Then, if you bid me go from you and hope no longer, I will obey; but, if you tell me that I can hope to one day win your hand, I will live down my luckless past and be worthy of you."

"So, I beg of you to meet me in the little boat-arch on the grounds of your uncle's mansion, at nine o'clock."

"I shall be there and know my fate from your sweet-lips."

RANDOLPH RAVEL."

"Oh! what shall I do?" cried the maiden, when she had finished reading the letter.

"I wish my uncle and Madge were here; but they will not return until very late, I know."

"I must not keep this ring, and yet I almost fear to go and meet him, for they have told me such terrible things about him."

"But I know not how to find him, and wish I had kept that messenger."

"Yes, I suppose I must meet him, as he asks, and he shall know that there is no hope for him ever to win my love."

With the ring clinched in one hand, the letter in the other, she paced to and fro for awhile, and then entering the mansion, went to her room.

The windows overlooked the beautiful harbor, here and there dotted with a sail, with the town and shipping further inland, and radiant under the rays of the setting sun.

The little smack lay at anchor not far away, but she did not connect it with the missive she had received.

Further down the bay the sunlight fell upon the brown sail of a small coaster coming in to an anchorage, borne along by the light breeze that was blowing.

Gradually the sunlight died, twilight came, lights sparkled here and there from the different vessels, and a maid appeared to light the candles and announce to Lady Lulu that tea was waiting.

She went to the table alone, but left the food untasted, and the stately butler in livery wondered at her loss of appetite.

As the distant tolling of a bell announced the hour of nine, she arose tremblingly, threw a cloak about her shoulders, and went out into the grounds.

Hastily she tripped along to the little arbor boat-house, and as she reached it a man's form stepped toward her.

"Lady Lulu, I thank you for this kindness," said the young man, stepping forward, and extending his hand.

"Mr. Ravel, I came to return your ring, and to tell you how sorry, how very sorry I am to know that you have lost the opportunities you once had of making a name of honor and fame, while, in your changed career you have my sympathy, with the hope that you may at least know happiness."

She had spoken rapidly, as though to end the interview at once, while she seemed not to see his extended hand.

"Then you will not believe me when I say that my enemies have ruined me, and that now, building up a new record, I can hope for your love?"

"No, you can never hope, for our paths in life have divided, and they must never meet again, and now I bid you farewell."

The man sprung suddenly forward, and threw over her head a cloak, while instantly she was seized from behind, and, unable to make an outcry she was borne to a waiting boat.

There were four in the party of kidnappers, and while one, he who had signed himself Randolph Ravel, held her firmly in his arms, the man Mart, took the tiller and the two others seized the oars and sent the boat rapidly away from the shore.

"Look out for that lugger, and give it a wide berth, Mart; but fortunately she has fainted," said the leader.

"I'll run astern of the lugger, sir," answered Mart, pointing the boat's bow accordingly.

"Yes."

Hardly had the affirmative left the lips of the leader, when the maiden uttered a loud cry for help.

"Save me! oh, save me!"

"Curses! I thought she was unconscious," cried the man, and he forced his hand hard over her mouth, while he said savagely:

"Pull, you devils, pull! for that lugger's crew are alarmed by her cry."

That this was true was certain, for the lugger swung around as though on a pivot and gave chase, a strong puff of wind coming just then to aid her, for it sent her swiftly through the waters.

"We'll be taken, sir," said Mart, anxiously, as the cutter was gaining, and they were yet a long way off from the little fishing-smack which they had left to go upon their kidnapping expedition.

"Curses, yes, and that must not be," was the savage response, and, as the lugger came nearer, the desperate man said:

"Lulu, yonder craft gains upon us! As you will not be mine, no other shall claim you, for thus I sacrifice you!"

As he spoke he raised her in his arms and threw her into the sea.

A wild shriek rung out over the waters, smothered by the waves as she sunk, and calling to Mart to seize an oar and aid him, the inhuman man also went to work and sent the boat on its way with increased speed.

But his cruel act had been seen by keen eyes upon the lugger, the despairing cry had been heard, and a form leaped into the sea and grasped the drowning girl, while the vessel luffed sharp and lay to.

Then a boat was lowered from the stern davits, and springing into it, an oarsman pulled rapidly toward the gallant rescuer.

"Take her in gently, Potomac, for she is unconscious," said a manly voice.

"No, I am conscious, sir, and I know that I owe you my life."

"My home is yonder, where you see that bright light, so I must ask you to take me there."

"Gladly, lady, and then I will try and capture you kidnappers, for such they are, doubtless."

"Yes, but I beg you to let them go."

As the boat was rapidly disappearing from view, and would have too far a start to attempt to follow, after he had landed the maiden, the bold rescuer made no reply to this request, and a moment after they reached the shore.

As he aided the maiden ashore she said, grasping the hand of her rescuer:

"I am the Lady Lulu Langdon, and this is my uncle's home, so you must come in and let him thank you for saving my life."

"No, lady, I must return at once to my vessel, and I bid you good-night, with the hope that you will suffer no ill from to-night's adventure."

As he spoke he raised his tarpaulin, and springing back into his boat gave the order to give way.

"Ah, sir! will you not let me at least know to whom it is I owe my gratitude?" called out the surprised maiden.

"It matters not, lady, for our walks in life go different ways," was the response, she thought in an embittered tone, and again raising his hat he sped on his way.

She stood where he had left her, watching the receding boat until she saw it board the waiting lugger, which at once got under way and sailed on toward the town.

Then, dripping, cold and half-ill from the shock, she wended her way toward the mansion, while she said aloud:

"I shall at least know that face wherever I meet it again, for it was not one to forget, if seen only in the night."

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG YANKEE SKIPPER.

It was on the eve of the great conflict, which was destined to give birth to the great American Republic, and dismember the powerful empire of England.

The mutterings of the coming war-cloud were heard from Maine to Georgia, and Americans, oppressed by the measures and malice of the British ministry, were ready to rise and cast off the yoke of tyranny and colonial bondage.

Petitions and pleas had proven unavailing, addressed to the stupid and irascible King George, and revolt was to follow.

England had seen the gathering of the storm, and was sending over her fleets and armies, to be ready to force the colonies into subjection should they break forth in revolution.

To add to her force upon the seas, the British naval officers were wont to take from on board American merchant vessels what men they needed, pressing them into service, and for this wicked practice, what was known as "Press-Gangs" went among the shipping at anchor in the ports, and seized young sailors upon whatever deck they could find them.

A large vessel-of-war was at anchor in the harbor of Boston at that time, and her boats were kept busy trying to impress all sailors they could find, while a small tender, a schooner with two guns and a crew of thirty men, cruised from time to time about the adjacent ports of Gloucester, Salem, Portsmouth and other places, to get seamen for the receiving-ship.

A British army was then garrisoning Boston, and much bitterness was shown continually between soldiers and citizens, and among whom a cordial hatred existed.

At the time our story opens a youth was standing upon a pier, waving his handkerchief as a signal, to some one on board of a small vessel standing off and on a few cable-lengths distant.

She was of the fore and aft style, with high stern, then much in use, and some thirty tons burden.

Her sails were browned by service and patched, and she carried a foresail, jib mainsail and a sort of topsail called a "highflyer."

At her maintop-head fluttered a swallow-tailed green flag, in the center of which was a mermaid, skillfully embroidered in colors, as though gliding over the sea.

Upon the deck of the vessel, which was of

trim build, sharp forward, lean astern, and showed good points of speed and seaworthy qualities, were two persons.

One of these sat at the helm, and managed the little vessel, as she stood off and on, with consummate ease and skill.

Though dressed in a rude sailor garb, it was evident that he was an Indian, one of the tribe of the Kennebecs, which have now about wholly passed from off the earth.

The second individual on board the coaster, for such the little craft was, was as black as a well-polished boot and as shiny.

He was dressed in a better sailor suit than was the Indian, and wore his tarpaulin with a rakish air that never failed to catch the eye of the dusky damsels of his own race, when he went ashore for a cruise in Boston town.

They were of about an age, the Indian and the negro, and Kennebec and Potomac were the names they were known by, the one after his tribe, the taking the other appellation from the river on the banks of which he was born.

The eyes of the two were fixed upon a large frigate, that was anchored half a mile away, and which was the receiving-ship for the victims of the cruel Press-Gang, so that they did not see the signal from the shore.

The one who waved the signal was, as I have said, a young man of perhaps twenty-one years of age.

He too was dressed as a sailor, and wore his clothes with a jaunty air that was very attractive.

Tall, broad-shouldered, small-waisted, he was perfect in build, his physique being that of an athlete, combined with grace in pose and movement.

He was darkly bronzed, his cheeks being tinged with the hue of health, and his features were delicately carved, expressive, and stamped with intelligence, daring and manliness of a high order.

His hands and feet were small and shapely, his black silk scarf neatly tied in a sailor knot under his broad collar, and a blue silk scarf encircled his waist and half hid a knife thrust into its folds.

Altogether he was one to attract the admiration of a man, and win the love of a woman.

In a graceful way he waved his handkerchief, which was as white as a woman's, and, unobservant of eyes fastened upon him, stamped his foot somewhat impatiently as he saw that those on the lugger failed to see the signal.

"Ah, my fine fellow, you are just the one I wish, for it is not often I catch as fine a fish as you seem to be."

The young man turned quickly and beheld an officer in the naval uniform of Great Britain, and with him were three seamen, who had evidently just landed from a boat upon the other side of the pier.

"How can I serve you, sir?" asked the youth politely, touching his tarpaulin in salute.

"By going upon a king's vessel, my lad, and becoming a foremast hand."

"No, sir, I have a little coasting craft of my own, and a mother depending upon my exertions for a living, and I do not care to become a deep-water sailor," was the firm, but polite response.

"It matters not what you wish to do, for the king wants just such fine fellows as you to man his ships, and I shall take you."

"Seize him, men!"

The three seamen advanced to obey their officer's bidding, but, instantly, the calm, courteous manner of the young skipper changed, and he cried, in a voice that rung like clashing metal:

"Back, all of you, for I am no slave to be seized and impressed on a king's ship!"

"Seize him, I say!" yelled the officer, furiously, and the men sprung forward once more, for they had shrunk back before the threatening attitude of the young sailor.

"Back, I warn you! I will not be taken!" came the ringing reply.

But the men had their orders and they rushed upon him, one to be felled his length upon the pier, where he lay stunned by the terrific blow given him on the temple, another to be hurled from the pier into the harbor, and the third to be seized by the throat, choked an instant, and then hurled backward with a force that sent him sprawling.

"Ha! strike king's men, do you? I'll spit you with my sword," shouted the officer, drawing his blade and rushing upon the young man.

But, quickly drawing his knife, the youth parried the thrust, and seizing the weapon, with an exhibition of remarkable strength, tore it from the Briton's hand and snapping the beautiful blade threw the pieces into the harbor.

"There, Sir Englishman, goes the sword you would have run me through with," cried the young American skipper, as he tossed the naked weapon into the harbor.

The British officer was wild with rage, and drawing a pistol threw it forward to fire, full upon the young sailor, when the weapon was struck up, just as the report came, and the bullet flew over the head of the intended victim.

"For shame, Lieutenant Nelson! for shame, to fire upon a disarmed man!"

The words rung with scorn, and the speaker was a woman.

Unseen by the others a party had landed from a man-of-war's boat and had seen all that had happened.

In the party there were four persons, one a gentleman of distinguished appearance, dressed in civilian attire of that age, and wearing several "orders" upon his breast as tokens of his king's appreciation of services rendered.

A second person was a gentleman of middle age, in the uniform of a British naval captain, and with a stern face by no means prepossessing.

The other two were maidens, and as different as daylight and darkness, for one was a golden-haired, blue-eyed beauty of seventeen, of the English type, and the other, a year her senior, was a brunette, with the American stamp of feature, and equally as lovely as her companion in both face and form.

They were handsomely dressed in boating attire, and had, evidently, just come from a trip on the water, when they had so opportunely arrived to hear and see what had occurred.

The one who had so boldly sprung forward and struck up the pistol of the English officer, thus saving the life of the bold young sailor, was the blonde, and her large blue eyes flashed, as she turned them upon the English lieutenant, whom she recognized, while the two seamen, the one who had been stunned by the blow, and the other who had been choked, now shrunk back, for they were again coming to the attack.

"Lady Lulu, I was in the discharge of my duty, as Captain Delafield there will tell you, for I have orders to impress all likely young Americans for his Majesty's service, and this one set upon us, and has doubtless cost the life of the king's man be hurled over the pier, for he could not swim," and the officer spoke earnestly in his own defense.

But the reply came very promptly:

"I know the cruel duty of the Press-Gang, sir, without asking Captain Delafield; but I was just upon the pier from our boat, and heard and saw all, and I admire that young gentleman for what he has done, while it is to him that I owe my life, as I now recognize in him the mysterious stranger who rescued me from the kidnappers two nights ago, and I wish you, uncle, to now thank him for his noble act," and she turned to the gentleman in civilian's suit, who said quickly:

"Indeed, Lulu, and this is the bold fellow, who slipped off so modestly from our thanks."

"Your hand, young man, and allow me to say how much of gratitude I owe you for saving my niece from those marauding pirates, who would have carried her off but for you."

"Your name, please?" and the gentleman still grasped the hand of the youth, whose face was flushed with embarrassment.

"Bert Brandon, sir," was the reply.

"Well, Master Bert Brandon, I am glad to meet you, and if you will let me know where I can find you, I will send you a golden souvenir of my gratitude."

The handsome face flushed deeper, and the eyes flashed, while the young man said, haughtily:

"Thank you, sir; but I am neither so poor nor so mean as to take gold for such an act as I was so fortunate as to render your niece."

"Ah!" and the gentleman was somewhat nonplused at the response, while the Lady Lulu said, earnestly:

"My gratitude, sir, is deeper than thanks or recompense can pay, I assure you."

"Your debt to me, lady, you have fully repaid, in just saving my life, as you did, and now saving me from the Press-Gang, so I am your debtor."

"But, here is my lugger standing in, and I will say farewell."

He raised his tarpaulin with courteous grace, and, as the Indian at the tiller ran the little lugger near the pier, as though to luff up, he called out:

"Keep her under headway, Kennebec, and I will jump aboard."

The Indian nodded, the youth made the spring upon the deck, and the lugger swept on; the naval officer had lost his prey.

"He drowned Coxswain Sheehan, sir, whom he threw into the water," said the lieutenant addressing Captain Delafield, who commanded the receiving-ship at anchor in the harbor.

"Then overhaul him with the tender and carry him aboard," whispered the captain, as he turned to join the elderly gentleman and two young ladies.

"I'll do it, and that insolent Yankee shall swing at the yard-arm for this day's work," declared the angry officer as he called to his men to follow him to their boat at the pier stairs.

CHAPTER III. THE FAIR COUSINS.

MR. RUPERT Wyndom was, so to speak, a "power in the land" of America.

He was a Tory, a gentleman, one respected by his king, and he had been given high rank in the colonies, being at the time this story opens, president of the king's council.

His father had been a British general in

America, in its early struggles with the Indians and the French, and the son, after finishing his education, had come to the colonies as his aide and private secretary.

While in America the young secretary had married the daughter of a wealthy Boston merchant, and thus had become thoroughly identified with the colonies.

His home on the shores of Boston Harbor was furnished in a style not surpassed in England, and was the resort of the officers of the army and navy, as well as of the rich and refined colonists.

At the time of the opening of this story, Mr. Wyndom was a man of fifty, of genial manner, and enjoyed life as it came, while he was the acknowledged leader of the Tory element and the adviser of the British generals and admirals.

For some years he had been a widower, but his only daughter, Madge, had been most tenderly reared and nurtured, and at eighteen was a brilliant, beautiful girl, the belle of Boston society.

A few weeks previous to the scenes narrated in the foregoing chapters, the secretary had received a letter from his brother-in-law, the Earl of Arleigh, which read as follows:

"ARLEIGH CASTLE.

"MY DEAR RUPERT:—

"Since your noble sister, my devoted wife, died, a year and a half ago, I have been wondering what I should do with my daughter, the young Lady Lulu.

"As you know, she is in her seventeenth year, very beautiful—if a father does say so—and remarkably matured and advanced for her years.

"In fact, she has already suitors by the score, and, though I do not believe her heart has been hurt yet, there is a young scapegrace that seems determined to win her from me.

"He was well born, and had high prospects before him in life; but, naturally bad, it seems, he went wrong, became dissipated, gambled away his patrimony, and at last was discovered in some very questionable work aboard his ship—for he was a naval officer—to raise money.

"He was promptly dismissed, and rumors have it that he has gone utterly to the bad.

"So I wish to have a change for Lulu, and, though I have her under the best governesses and tutors, I am not suited to the raising of a young lady, and I know that you are.

"So I send her to you, knowing you will be as a father to her, and your lovely daughter as a sister to her.

"She will leave with Admiral Shuldham, who has kindly consented to take her under his charge, as he sails for America in two weeks, sent out by the king to command the British fleet in the northern waters of the American colony.

"The Lady Lulu will bring with her some souvenirs for you and dear Madge, and ample exchange notes for all money she may need.

"She is anxious to go to America, and I think if she has been heart-hurt by that young wretch, Ravel, she will soon get over it with you and her sweet cousin; but, should she prove a worry to you, or grow homesick, do not hesitate to let her return to me at once.

"From the mutterings heard upon all sides, I do fear we are to have war with the American colonies; but the king's gallant tars and soldiers will soon crush out rebellion.

"With love to Madge, and best wishes for your health and happiness,

"Affectionately, your brother,

"LANGDON OF ARLEIGH."

Nothing could have given the secretary and Madge more pleasure than did this letter, and preparations were at once begun to receive the young English girl.

Castle Wyndom, as the home of the secretary was generally called by all, on account of its turrets and great size, was, as I have said, most delightfully situated, within pleasant walking distance of Boston, and upon the harbor shores.

There were some half-score acres about it, a pine-wood park in the front on the highway, and a lawn and ornamental grounds on the water front.

Spacious halls, substantial wings, a large dining-hall, a breakfast-room, library, vast parlors and a sitting-room were upon the first floor, with delightful bed chambers on the second.

The larger tower at the north end was used as a cupola, and, handsomely furnished as a sitting-room, was a most delightful resort, while the view from there was simply superb.

The southern wing contained a suite of rooms, which Madge claimed as her own, and these were overhauled and made most luxurious and cozy for the Lady Lulu to share them with her, for there were two handsome bedchambers, a sitting-room opening upon a balcony overhanging the flower-gardens, and another overlooking the harbor, while a fourth room was what Madge called her "studio," it being where she painted, embroidered and studied her lessons and music, for she was still under the care of able tutors, who drove out daily from Boston to instruct her.

A noble-hearted, impulsive girl, beautiful and fascinating, and her father loving, genial and kind, there was little doubt but that the Lady Lulu would be most happy there in her new home.

And, as the time drew near when Admiral Shuldham's fleet should be sighted, Madge was wont to spend much time in the cupola looking

For the glance of a sail,
Spread on the distant sea.

At last the fleet was sighted, and a fleet vessel,

held in readiness, sailed out to meet the voyagers, the secretary and Madge on board.

The flag-ship was signaled, and the little schooner ran near her, hailed, and Mr. Wyndom and his daughter were invited on board.

The bluff old admiral welcomed them heartily, for he had known the secretary in England; but great was their disappointment to learn that the fleet had been ordered off several days sooner than it was expected it would sail, and without delay, and hence the Lady Lulu was not on board.

"But she'll be right along in our wake, Wyndom, for my fleet dispatch brig remained to wait for later orders, and I sent a messenger to the earl, telling him to put the Lady Lulu under Lieutenant Neal Nelson's care, for he is coming out to take command of a vessel here, and is a handsome, dashing fellow, and they'll be in love with each other before they get half-way across the sea."

It was a little disappointment to Madge, but she could only await the coming of the brig, which the admiral told her was about the fleetest craft in the British Navy, adding:

"She will enjoy her voyage far more, Miss Wyndom, as there are a number of ladies on board, the wives of army officers stationed in the colonies, and they'll be a jolly party."

Returning home, Madge went at once to the cupola, and hardly had she leveled her powerful glass out upon the sea, when she called to her father, who was seated in an easy-chair in the yard below.

"Father, the admiral said the dispatch vessel was a brig, with very tall masts, and an outfit of new canvas, did he not?"

"Yes, my child."

"She is in sight, and from a direction I had not looked for her. Yes, and there is a schooner astern of her! Oh, father! the schooner is chasing the brig! Hark!"

Across the waters came the deep boom of a gun, and the secretary at once hastened to the cupola.

"It is without doubt the dispatch brig, Madge, and she is crowding along under full sail, while that schooner is in chase, and must be a Frenchman or a pirate. I will at once drive to town and inform the admiral."

The secretary hastened away, and soon after Madge saw the carriage roll rapidly along the highway to the town.

Watching the vessels, she saw that both were under all the canvas they could carry, and the brig was firing from her stern guns, while the schooner kept up a steady fire from her bow chasers.

The schooner was very fast, and seemed to be gaining a trifle upon the brig, yet very little, and unless the latter was crippled by a shot, there was every prospect that she would escape.

In a little while after, Madge saw a stir in the harbor, and soon after a schooner shot away from her anchorage, going seaward.

Then a light brig-of-war, and next a sloop set sail.

"Father has done good work indeed, for there goes even the receiving ship," cried Madge.

Her position gave her a sweep of the entire bay, and she soon saw that the brig was safe, though the schooner in chase still followed her.

"Ah, he sees the little schooner coming out to fight him, and yet he holds on."

"He is a bold fellow indeed, for he must see all of the vessels now," and Madge wondered at the daring of the former, which still held on in chase of the brig.

Finding at last that he dare not venture in range of the frigate's broadside, he luffed sharp as though to go about.

But instantly he sent a broadside after the brig, and Madge uttered a cry of alarm as she saw its topmast shot away.

Then the daring pursuer sent a broadside at the little armed schooner, that was boldly running out in the lead of all, and so well aimed was it that the bowsprit was cut away, as Madge distinctly saw.

But the sloop and frigate were now under clouds of canvas, and sweeping down under a good breeze, seemed to move at a speed that the pursuer felt it wise not to test at too close range, for he went about and stood seaward.

The brig was now safe, while the frigate and sloop stood seaward in chase of her pursuer, and darkness coming on, the three vessels soon after disappeared from view.

An hour after Madge heard wheels upon the drive, and running to the door found her cousin had arrived.

The warm greeting of the English girl made her feel at once at home, and during supper she told how the brig had been chased by the schooner from the very day they left the English channel.

"Oh, Madge! you have no idea the anxiety we all felt, for it soon became known, in spite of all the efforts of the officers to deceive us, that our pursuer was a pirate."

"In vain did we try to throw him off our track, for he hung there day and night, and in light weather and storm."

"The brig is very fast, and her officers were surprised to see her so closely held by another vessel, and we kept under full sail all the time."

"One night we had a calm, and the schooner was a league from us."

"I heard Lieutenant Neal Nelson, who is a fine sailor and very pleasant gentleman, and acted as first lieutenant coming over, for he is to have a commission here, I heard him tell the captain that the pirate would doubtless attempt to board in his boats."

"So all the crew were armed and slept on deck, while the passengers, and there were a dozen of us, were ordered to remain in the cabin and our state-rooms."

"Sure enough, just before dawn I was awakened by Lieutenant Nelson's voice shouting out:

"Keep off, or I fire into you!"

"Derisive laughter came from out on the calm waters, and then followed the order to fire."

"Oh! it was terrible! but the boats were beaten back, for though the crew of the dispatch brig numbered but forty men, we had on board some twenty officers of the army, a dozen men-servants, and a marine guard, which made our force superior to that of the schooner."

"So they were beaten off, and a breeze springing up, we came on our way; but there hung the schooner as before, right in our wake, though the vessels sailed with such equality of speed she could not gain upon us."

"As we neared port, she pressed us very hard, and they had rigged and sent up some driving sails, for we were before the wind, which caused her to creep up nearer."

"As they saw that we must escape her, they viciously opened fire, and we could only reply with our light stern guns."

"Lieutenant Nelson told the captain that but for the precious freight he carried—"

"Meaning you, of course, Lulu," said the secretary slyly.

"Yes, uncle, and the other ladies—he would risk a fight with the pirate; but they had to run as it was, and yet they cost us a number of good men, for in the attack in the calm a dozen fell, while the schooner's fire this afternoon brought several brave fellows to the deck."

"But here I am, and I am so happy to be with you all, I assure you, and I shall look upon this as my real home."

"Do so, Lulu, and you will make both Madge and myself most happy," was the earnest response of the secretary, and so the English girl's entrance to her American home was a most joyous one indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

RUNNING A GANTLET.

HAVING made my reader acquainted, in part, with some of the characters of my romance, who are introduced in the first and second chapters, I will now return to the daring young skipper who so boldly resented the attack of the Press-Gang to make him a prisoner, and whose life would have been the forfeit, but for the timely act of Lady Lulu.

The officer who had led the attack upon Bert Brandon, was Lieutenant Neal Nelson, who had come over in the dispatch brig with Lady Lulu.

He was a handsome man, the younger son of a nobleman, had proven himself a thorough seaman, and was winning his way up rapidly.

After his arrival in port he had been placed in command of the Vicious, a trim little schooner of sixty tons, and a crew of forty men.

She carried two guns, pivots, fore and aft, and was a very fast sailor.

For officers Lieutenant Nelson had a junior luff and four midshipmen, and, as the duty of impressment kept him in port, where he could see Lady Lulu, with whom he had fallen desperately in love, he was more than happy, for he believed he could win her.

Handsome, of fascinating address, and rich, he was greatly courted and admired, while he was considered a good "catch" among old dowagers with daughters to trade off for gold or title.

The large frigate, which was the receiving-ship, was made the flagship of Admiral Shuldham, while the cruisers of his fleet were sent off along the coast, cruising on various missions.

A sloop-of-war then in port, under command of Captain Delafield, a particular friend of Secretary Wyndom, was then made the recipient of the impressed men, and as seamen for the British Navy were very much needed just then, and volunteers in American waters were very scarce, the Press-Gangs were set to work continually, and the skippers of vessels were constantly on the watch to save their crews.

Owning his own vessel, and with but the Indian and the negro as a crew, it was not to be wondered at that Bert Brandon resented the idea of being made a seaman on a British vessel-of-war.

Educated as he was, refined in manner, he rebelled at the thought of being forced to go before the mast and do the drudge work of a gun hand on board ship, when he felt himself competent to command a vessel.

So he had fearlessly resisted the cruel conduct of Lieutenant Nelson toward him, and the result the reader has seen.

The day that the affair occurred, the secre-

tary, with Lady Lulu and Madge, had been to dine on the sloop-of-war with Captain Delafield, who was to escort them home and remain to tea, and they had just landed on the water stairs, when they saw and beheld what had happened.

Instantly, as she saw his face, Lady Lulu had recognized her rescuer from Ravel a few weeks before, and which kidnapping scheme had occurred but ten days after her arrival in America.

She had only seen her preserver in the dark, but even then she had said, as he left her without giving his name, that she would remember him if she saw him again.

Within a month she again met him, and she did recognize him at a glance, and sprung forward and struck up Neal Nelson's pistol just in time to save his life.

As the young skipper departed so quickly, she had had no opportunity to talk with him; but she had seen that he was a man of distinguished appearance, even though he wore the garb of a sailor, and his manners were courteous and even elegant.

Madge was also struck with his fine looks and gentlemanly air, while both could not but admire his courage and the manner in which he had handled Lieutenant Nelson and the sailors.

"I do not wonder that you remember that face, Lulu," whispered Madge Wyndom, as they walked toward their carriage in waiting, not dreaming that Captain Delafield meant yet to seize the young skipper.

Arriving at home Lulu hastened up to the cupola, and thither Madge followed her, for they wished to see the little lugger run out of the harbor, as they began to feel a dread, from words spoken on the way out, that she might be pursued, as the receiving-ship was bringing to all vessels bound and in out to throw a Press-Gang on board and search for seamen to seize.

"It is positively necessary, young ladies, and there are hundreds of these able-bodied young Americans, who are perfect seamen, and might as well serve his Majesty as run on a miserable coaster from port to port," the captain had said.

Upon reaching the cupola, the maidens saw the admiral's frigate anchored about two miles below what was at that time Boston town, and southwest from Governor's Island, from which it was about half a mile distant.

The flagship rode at a single anchor, her royal yards across, and her three topsails were brailed up and hanging in graceful folds from the yards.

She was a trim craft, snug aloft and aloft, and a vessel to gladden a sailor's eye.

The lugger was seen now running out from among the shipping, and standing out off the harbor, heading so as to give as wide a berth as possible to the flagship, the sloop-of-war and the schooner, which was the tender of the latter vessel in the Press-Gang service, and both of which lay at anchor in such positions as to command the harbor entrances.

"See! the lugger is heading as though to run out by Shirley Gut, as she fears to attempt to try the gantlet of the frigate in the main channel," said Madge, who knew pretty well the various channels out of the harbor.

"There is the reason, Madge," and Lady Lulu pointed to two boats that had suddenly put out from the sloop-of-war, or station-ship, as though to head off the lugger.

"Yes, the sun glances on the weapons of armed men, and they are boats from the station-ship; but I fear there is not water enough for him in Shirley Gut and he will be taken," Madge said, anxiously.

"Oh, how cruel for England to thus treat these poor Americans, Madge," and Lady Lulu's eyes flashed indignantly.

"I am glad, Lulu, that you see things as I do, for England does override this land with iron heel; but father, of course, is not in sympathy with the Americans, and no one of our set other than I, can see that the king does wrong in his acts toward these noble, free-hearted people."

"I have felt for them, Madge, ever since I have heard of their bravery and listened to stories of what was done here."

"I do hope they will not capture the lugger," and Madge answered quickly.

"Not if that handsome rescuer of yours can help it, for see, he disobeys all their signals to come to."

"I glory in his courage; but will they not fire on him and sink him from the frigate, sloop or schooner?"

"From here it looks so, Lulu; but the course he is taking is to avoid the fire from the vessels by keeping the islands between, though he will have to run the gantlet of the boats."

"And see, the frigate is sending out her boats, as is also the schooner Vicious."

"Then Lieutenant Nelson has had orders signaled from the frigate to do so, or he would hardly attempt the capture of the young sailor, after you gave him your protection, as it were."

"Or he may not have gone on board, and his junior officer may have sent the boats."

And so the maidens discussed the subject, while the daring young skipper held on his way,

though five men-of-war boats were striving to head him off and capture him, the courses for them to steer being signaled from Copp's Hill, where there was a signal-station.

Then the two maidens turned their glances upon the lugger, which was skipping along under a six-knot breeze, and holding on well through the way her young skipper had chosen to run out.

"He is at the helm, Madge," said Lulu, and she added:

"He stands up and steers with the tiller against his thigh, while he holds a glass and turns it upon the vessels and the boats."

"Yes, and a tall negro is forward throwing the lead, for they well know how little water they have through that way, and that if they touch they are gone."

"Few vessels of her size dare attempt to make that run by the Apple Island Channel."

"There is a man on deck, with a bucket on a pole, throwing water upon the sails, Madge, for they know, to avoid being headed off, they must keep the lugger at her utmost speed in this wind."

"Yes, and she slips along swiftly too, does she not?"

Drawing five feet as she did, the lugger had to keep the channel very closely, and it gave her by no means much water under her keel, and this Madge knew, for she was very fond of sailing and many a time had she gone over the entire bay.

As the armed boats had headed, four of them were in a fair way to cut her off as she ran out of Shirley Gut, while the others, following her through the channel, had her in a very close place, as the reader can well imagine.

"I fear that large barge will capture him, Lulu, after he gets around the island, for it has pulled across the South Shoal."

"Can he not run his vessel ashore and escape?" asked Lady Lulu anxiously.

"Yes, he could have put away and run ashore on Chelsea Point; but, I think he is one to stick to his ship."

"The four boats crossing the shoal will surely head him off, and they carry fully fifty men, so there is no hope for him and he must know it."

"He cannot see them from his position, Lulu, but knows, from having seen them start, the course they took, and is on the watch for them—oh! the man who was throwing water on the sails is taking the helm now."

"Then the brave fellow has given it up and means to surrender—no! he is going up into the rigging."

As the maiden spoke the young skipper was seen to ascend the rigging, and from his elevated point looked around the horizon.

They saw him motion to the man at the helm, and the lugger changed her course somewhat, while the one forward ceased casting the lead.

Just then the secretary and Captain Delafield came up into the cupola, having seen from their seat on the piazza that there was some excitement going on upon the waters.

"Well, young ladies, what are you gazing at so intently?" the captain asked, though, having ordered Lieutenant Nelson to pursue the young skipper he well knew what was going on, though he had not even hinted to his host.

"We are watching that bold young skipper defy the efforts of your boats to capture him, Captain Delafield, and, as you admire pluck, please take my glass and see for yourself," and Madge handed her glass to the officer while Lulu gave hers to her uncle, with the remark:

"Uncle, if you care for me you must not let that young man be put on board the station-ship as a common sailor, for he saved me from death."

"We will do all we can for him, Lulu, after what he did for you—Oh! he luffs up to surrender, for he sees the boats have headed him off, and there is no chance for him to escape."

"No, no! he has not surrendered, but put back toward the town," cried Madge, excitedly, as the lugger was seen to put about and head back on the course she had come.

CHAPTER V.

THE YANKEE SKIPPER'S PLUCK.

"If he can get back to an anchorage, young ladies, he will be safe from impressment, as the law does not allow us to impress a man upon a moving vessel," said Captain Delafield, as he saw that the lugger was heading back for an anchorage in front of the town.

"But he has the barge in Shirley's Gut to pass, and in that narrow channel he can never do it, for he has no water of depth enough to sheer off in," the secretary remarked.

"Then he will be taken?" anxiously asked Lady Lulu.

"Without doubt, for I recognize the barge as being from the Vicious, and Lieutenant Nelson is not a man to be thwarted."

"Yet, Captain Delafield, did he act right in pursuing the lugger after he knew that the young skipper had saved Lady Lulu's life, and you had allowed him to go free?" asked Madge Wyndom.

"He was signaled to do so, evidently, Miss Wyndom, and could only obey orders."

"Having started to capture the lugger, he did his best, and she, having avoided the four boats that were heading her off, is either going back to surrender, or attempt to reach an anchorage."

"And I hope he can do both," said Lady Lulu.

"He deserves it, for the plucky way he has run the gantlet, and he may dodge by Nelson, though the chances are a hundred to one against him."

"He cannot do it, captain, as he will meet the barge in the very narrowest part of the channel," said the secretary.

"Then he is doomed."

"Will he surrender?" asked Lady Lulu.

"He must, for Nelson has over a dozen men with him, as you see."

"And but three on the lugger, so it would be madness to resist," Madge said.

"No man would dare resist a king's officer, Miss Madge," the captain dryly remarked.

"Well, that young skipper resisted a king's officer a little over an hour ago, and did it well, too," Lady Lulu responded.

"Yes, and broke poor Nelson's sword and tossed it into the sea, which will be a fearful blow to the lieutenant, as that weapon was a present from the king for services he had rendered."

"He should have honored it too highly to draw it upon an unarmed man," said Lady Lulu.

"We have no sympathy here, Delafield, for it is all with the young Yankee skipper," the secretary remarked with a laugh.

"Egad! that's so, Mr. Wyndom, and— Bless me! I believe that fellow intends to run down a king's boat!"

All eyes were now turned upon the lugger and the barge.

The former was driving gallantly along, making eight knots out of a seven-knot breeze, and was closely following the narrow channel where there was water enough for her if her helmsman made no mistake.

Ahead of her, directly across her bows, was the large barge, half of the men resting upon their oars, and the others having seized their pistols and cutlasses prepared to throw themselves aboard.

Astern of the lugger were the other four boats, a long way off, but pressing toward the scene to be in at the capture if possible.

It was a thrilling moment, and the four persons in the cupola regarded the situation with feelings of mingled hope, dread and foreboding.

The daring gantlet run by the young skipper had now attracted attention all along the shore, and upon the various vessels, and one and all were watching the result with breathless interest, the Americans giving their sympathy to the bold Yankee at the helm, and the British to their comrades in the boats.

Nearer and nearer the lugger approached the boat, and the naval officer in the cupola said in an excited tone:

"If he strikes that barge he puts his head into a noose."

Lady Lulu and Madge were now white with anxiety.

They could see now without the aid of the glasses, and in breathless silence all awaited.

"God grant he be not so reckless as to strike the barge," said the secretary.

"It should get out of his way," Madge replied.

"The skipper holds the helm and his two men are not now in sight," said Lady Lulu.

"Nelson is hailing him! see! he waves his sword, but that wild devil holds on—no, he veers, and will attempt to go by—see! the oars fall in the water to lay the barge alongside—Great God! he has run her down!"

The rapid words of Captain Delafield in the thrilling instant before the crash but told what all saw.

The lugger had run down the barge.

The crew of the barge had fired on the lugger, and the reports of their pistols had come to the ears of the onlookers.

But Bert Brandon had swerved slightly, to see if he could go by, and discovering that he could not, had brought his bows directly against the quarter of the barge.

The side was stove in, the stern was forced under water, and the lugger swept by, leaving destruction in her wake.

"Bravo! see, Nelson has leaped upon the bowsprit and sprung upon the deck, while his men who attempted to follow him have been hurled back into the water—ha! the young skipper gives the negro the tiller and dashes into the cabin—by Heaven! but he returns with a blade and dashes upon Nelson."

"Now the young Yankee skipper has met his match, for Neal Nelson is the best swordsman in the British Navy—what! Nelson disarmed, ay, and a prisoner! can I believe my own eyes?" and Captain Delafield rubbed them as though he was surely mistaken.

"No, sir, there is no mistake, for the best swordsman in the British Navy has been disarmed by a Yankee skipper," cried Madge, and there was real glee in her tones.

"Yes, and he has taken the helm once more,

while his men are lowering the yawl at the stern davits—see! they set it adrift, what is that for?" cried Lady Lulu.

"Young lady, that is a noble act, for the young skipper is as generous as he is brave, and has set his yawl adrift to save the men he ran down."

"Observe how they swim to it, some helping others who do not swim well, or were hurt."

"Mr. Wyndom, I admire that Yankee, sir, and I cannot help it," said Captain Delafield.

"He is deserving of our admiration, Delafield, and I am glad to see the men reaching the yawl, and all will be picked up before the other boats come up, while, but for the act of the young sailor half would have been drowned; but what will he do now?" and the secretary continued to gaze with deeper interest upon the flying lugger.

"Run for an anchorage as quickly as he can," said Madge.

"It will do him no good, now that he has run down a king's boat, my child," said the secretary.

"He will then run to Chelsea Point and beach his vessel, escaping with his crew to the shore, well knowing that the villagers will hide them from king's officers," Captain Delafield remarked.

"Yes, that is his only chance, and he knows it," Mr. Wyndom said.

"Lieutenant Nelson is taking his captivity coolly, for he stands with folded arms near the skipper," Madge remarked.

"His presence will prevent the lugger from being fired on, should he run in range of the fire of any of our vessels."

"See! other boats are putting off from the frigate, and that Yankee has run himself into a hornets' nest," and Captain Delafield laughed lightly.

"So far the hornets have had the sting taken out of them," Lulu responded saucily.

"I'm getting stung now, and by a butterfly," the captain responded gallantly, while the secretary laughingly remarked:

"A butterfly with a sting, is like a rose with a thorn, Delafield, but let us watch that bold mariner."

The position of the Mermaid was now critical in the extreme, although she had left her pursuers far astern, and had run one boat down.

Birds' Island lay upon her starboard quarter, and to the south pulling toward her was a barge full of red-coated soldiers, who had joined in the chase, having come from Long Wharf.

Beyond the barge was the frigate, from whose side other boats had just left to add their strength to the chase after the bold fugitive.

At the main royal mast-head signals were flying, and they were being answered from the signal station on Copp's Hill, from whence a perfect view was obtainable by the officer there of all going on.

The town lay now ahead of the Mermaid, as she was pointing, with groups of vessels anchored off the wharves, while towering above all was the monument on Beacon Hill.

The water about the lugger was very shoal, and a loss of nerve would ground her and end all, as the lookers-on well understood, and not one who beheld her, from those in the cupola of Wyndom Castle, and the signal officer on Copp's Hill, to the pursuers, the people crowding the shores and wharves and seamen on the vessels-of-war could see the shadow of a chance for Bert Brandon to escape from his foes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FUGITIVE MERMAID.

BETWEEN Birds' Island what is now known as East Boston, a shoal stretched well out from the land, and within it were the waters of the harbor proper, and where a vessel fleeing from a Press-Gang boat could drop anchor and come under the protection of the British law then existing.

This shoal the lugger had just cleared, the wind steadily increasing, as though to lend aid to so much daring, and sending her along at a slapping pace which surprised all who saw her.

But the lugger had good points for sailing and stanchness, too, and stood well up under the pressure of the wind, while she certainly showed that she was a sea flyer, far beyond what vessels of her class were expected to do.

"Father, do you think she will be captured?" asked Madge, earnestly.

"It cannot be possible otherwise, my child," replied the secretary.

"Is there not a shadow of a chance, sir?" Lady Lulu asked, plaintively.

"He might, for he seems the man to do it, tack ship and run down the harbor, risking the fire of the frigate, my vessel, the schooner, and the castle; but if he escaped the vessels' fire, for they would have to be cautious firing in the harbor, I think the guns of the castle would blow him out of the water," Captain Delafield said.

"Yes, he is now in the harbor, so can only come to anchor and let the boats board him," added the secretary.

"He is running for the wharves, sir," said Madge, as she saw that the Mermaid was stretching directly across the harbor.

The wind had shifted more to the northward, and the lugger was braced up sharp and headed toward Faneuil Hall, as though it were a beacon light to steer by, while the barge of soldiers was not very far off and the nearest of her enemies to her.

"What does that mean?" suddenly cried the captain, as he beheld the negro and Indian spring forward and quickly ease off her jib, fore and mainsheets, and the bow sweep around until the wind was brought dead astern.

"She is going to lay to and surrender, and I am glad the agony is over," replied the secretary.

"I thought him too good a seaman to blunder thus in bringing a vessel to anchor," and Captain Delafield looked disgusted.

"He has made no mistake, captain, for that does not look like anchoring," cried Madge, as she saw the Mermaid heading dead north, and flying along like a bird.

"Neptune's ghost! he is going to beach his craft on Charlestown shore and not surrender after all," and both Lady Lulu and Madge laughed at the surprise of the naval officer, and the renewed boldness of the Yankee skipper filled them with delight, for after all there was a chance for him to escape, though he must lose his vessel necessarily.

"That fellow deserves an epaulet from the king's own hand," said Captain Delafield, as he saw the Mermaid now leaving the boats and all her foes far astern, just when her capture seemed assured.

"Bravo!" cried the maidens together, and then all watched what move Bert Brandon would take next.

The Mermaid was now surely destined to destruction, it was said, whatever her crew might have befell them, as to run her ashore seemed the only chance.

But the reader must know that the Charles River flows into Boston Harbor between the town of Charlestown and the peninsula on which the city stands, and a hundred years ago the stream was not a network of bridges as now, while it was navigable for light-draught vessels for perhaps half a dozen miles inland.

This the young skipper knew, and though it seemed like running one's head into the lion's mouth, he caused an exclamation to go up from thousands of throats, as the vessel's course changed quickly, the mainsail was thrown to starboard, and, wing-and-wing, the lugger headed into the Charles River.

"By the Lord Harry! but that young man is a daring one," cried the secretary with admiration, as he beheld the maneuver.

"And as skillful as he is brave!"

"See, the breeze is fair for him to run up into Back Bay, ascend the river with the wind abeam, and be miles inland when dark overtakes him, so that he can readily escape."

"The barges still pursue him," Lady Lulu remarked.

"Yes; they dare not give up the chase until dark, and are now being ridiculed, I'll wager, by the people ashore and on the wharves."

"There go some soldiers at a double-quick, and they will doubtless end the matter now by picking off the crew," and Captain Delafield seemed to feel that after all the end had come for the lugger's fearless captain.

"Will not the young man place his prisoner as a shield to prevent their firing?" asked the secretary.

"One would think so; but he does not, for see, he has not moved his position, though he waved his hand to his men, and they at once dropped upon the decks, while Nelson still has not been placed as a shield certainly, Captain Delafield said.

"They are going to fire!" breathlessly said Lady Lulu.

"Ah! Nelson has checked them, for see, he signals the commander of the soldiers, who salutes, and orders his men to bring their muskets to a carry," and all in the cupola watched the flying lugger until a bend in the river shut her out from their view.

Then Captain Delafield said, bluntly:

"Ladies, your Yankee hero has escaped, and if I can but capture him, I'll place an epaulet upon his shoulder, for bolder work than he has done this day I never saw, and he well deserves success for his skill and iron nerve."

With glad hearts the two cousins clapped their hands, while the secretary added:

"Yes, Delafield, that young skipper deserves a commission in the king's service, and he shall have it, even though he did throw one of his Majesty's sailors off the wharf, and run down a barge."

"Surely, you would look upon a man as a coward who did not defend himself, Captain Delafield?"

"Egad, I would, Lady Lulu; but then orders must be obeyed, and when the king wants men, they must submit."

"But I never saw a youth show such pluck and seamanlike qualities as he has shown this afternoon, and am half sorry I was not in Nelson's place to witness all from the lugger's deck."

"I only hope he will not harm Lieutenant Nelson," said the secretary, "for should he do so, I fear we cannot save him."

"He'll treat him all right, for if he had meant to harm him, he would have done so in the heat of anger, when he disarmed him."

"But I do not understand how a Yankee skipper could handle a vessel as he did, and especially disarm Neal Nelson, whom I have often fenced with, and always to my defeat, and I am considered a good hand with a blade," and the handsome captain of forty-five smiled with benign self-satisfaction at his own accomplishments, which certainly were of no mean order, as he was a splendid seaman, and noted as a brave and gallant officer, who once, when a midshipman, found himself in command of a small brig, in action with a large French vessel, and, instead of striking his colors, after the death of his three superior officers, had fought until his craft went down with her colors flying, when he was picked up by his foe.

Taken to prison, he had made his escape and cut out, with the aid of his crew, whom he had helped out, too, a fine French merchantman.

So the captain justly felt pride in himself, while, a fine-looking man, holding a high rank, a bachelor with a good income, he was greatly courted in colonial society.

When night fell upon the scene, the party adjourned from the cupola to the library, and tea was soon after served.

As, at a late hour the captain arose to depart, the deep boom of a heavy gun fell upon their ears and all started, for what could it mean.

"That gun is from my vessel," cried the captain, and a moment after he had stepped into the carriage and was being driven rapidly to the town, while the secretary and the two maidens once more sought the cupola as a point of lookout.

CHAPTER VII.

A CAPTIVE.

LET us now make a visit to the deck of the bold lugger, which had so gallantly run a deadly gantlet, and present to the reader her young skipper and crew for a better acquaintance.

Bert Brandon was the owner of the little vessel, and her captain, and the Indian and the negro comprised his crew.

A coaster between the Kennebec, Portland, Portsmouth or Boston, as the trade carried her, she was of a better class of vessel than was usually seen in this work, and on this account often carried passengers to and fro.

The Indian, Kennebec, was a perfect sailor, did his work without an order, and seemed devoted to his young skipper.

He was a man of fine physique, as strong as a lion, while his movements were as quick as a cat.

The negro was also possessed of a sturdy frame, had been a sailor from boyhood, and, stolen from his home on the Potomac by a British cruiser, had escaped one day in Portland and been befriended by Bert Brandon, to whom he clung afterward as his master.

He was as good a cook as he was a sailor, and the fare on the Mermaid was pronounced first-class by those who had tried it.

The vessel itself had a roomy cabin, very neat throughout, and all about her was kept as ship-shape as on board a man-of-war.

Upon springing on board, from the pier, Bert Brandon had at once taken the helm, while he said:

"I am sorry you did not see my signal sooner, lads, for it might have prevented trouble; but I suppose it had to come."

"We was watchin' them Press-Gang boats, Massa Bert, for dey seen us stan'in' off an' on, an' were jist layin' fer us ter run out, and dis Virginny nigger knows jist what it am ter be a sailor on board dem craft, and me and Kennebec were considerin' ef you c'u'dn't run out through Shirley Gut and give 'em de slip."

This long explanation was satisfactory, as to why the signal had not been seen, and Bert Brandon responded:

"It's all right, Potomac, and we will try the Shirley Gut, though I never heard of but one vessel of this size running through that way, and that was a harbor pirate some years ago; but I have often sailed through in a small boat."

"Golly, Massa Bert, how you did knock dem sailor folks round de dock; and oh my! didn't dat putty lady skeer dat ossifer most ter death?" and Potomac laughed, while Kennebec said:

"Girl much brave, make good squaw for sea chief."

In spite of himself the young sailor blushed, and then he kept his eyes down the harbor, as though watching his chances for running out.

The eyes of the crews on the various vessels were upon him, wondering what he would do to escape the Press-Gang boats, and delighted at the pluck he had shown to strike the king's men and break their officer's sword, for many had witnessed the act from their decks.

For awhile the lugger stood off and on, and then, Bert Brandon having made up his mind as to her course, she shot away down the harbor, followed by the mental "God speed you, brave lad," of many a skipper who saw him start.

The daring run he made, has been seen by the reader, from the cupola of Castle Wyndom, and how the young sailor had to go up into the rigging to pick out his course by the color of the water, the deeper blue marking the greater depth.

When he saw that it would be madness to attempt to dash through the four boats that had rounded him off, Bert Brandon decided promptly to put about and run for the Charles River.

He knew that he would have to run by one boat to do this, but he hoped to be able to dodge it in some way.

As he drew near, on his backward run, he recognized in the stern of the barge the officer he had defeated upon the pier.

A bitter smile curled the lip of the young sailor, and he muttered:

"If I have to run him down, I am glad that it is one who has given me cause."

As they came nearer the boat, Bert Brandon saw that they could not have met in a worse place, for just there the channel was very narrow, and he had no chance to sheer by.

"I must run him down, lads, for it is our only chance," he said resolutely.

"All same to Kennebec," was the indifferent reply of the Indian.

"Massa know jist what to do," was Potomac's philosophical response.

Making a movement as though to sheer by, the skipper suddenly brought his bows back and headed directly for the stern quarter of the barge.

At once arose a cry of alarm, while Lieutenant Nelson shouted, at the same time firing his pistol at the daring helmsman.

"Port your helm, you Yankee lubber, or you'll be into us!"

"Port, hard a-port!"

But the bows never swerved, and then came the cry:

"Spring for your lives, men!"

"Board him!"

The crash followed, the oars were snapped like pipe-stems, the gunwale was stove in, and the stern forced under the keel of the lugger.

The men had sprung indeed for their lives, while some were forced down with the barge.

The brave lieutenant had sprung for the bowsprit, caught a good hold, and the next instant was upon the deck of the lugger, when he instantly drew his sword, for his remaining pistol he had had to let go to save himself.

His men were less fortunate, and not one of them had gained a footing upon the lugger, though several had caught hold of the martingale and anchor-flukes, but been forced to let go and save themselves as best they could.

"Here, Potomac, cut the yawl loose and let it drift to the aid of those poor fellows, while you, Kennebec, take the helm and hold her as she is."

So saying, Bert Brandon darted into the cabin, seized an old rapier, and met Neal Nelson advancing rapidly aft.

"You are my prisoner, lieutenant," he said calmly.

The response was a savage blow to cut down the young sailor; but which, to the Englishman's surprise, was skillfully warded off.

Thinking that it was an accidental act, Neal Nelson made a thrust, which was also parried.

"Hal! you understand the use of a blade, Sir Yankee, so have at thee!" and the British officer pressed forward to the attack, when he was disarmed, his sword flying off into the sea.

"Curses on you! there is my second sword you have lost this day!" cried the young officer.

"You are my prisoner, sir, and as I do not wish to confine you below, I hope you will give me your word not to make any attack on me or my crew."

"I do, sir, and I thank you," said Nelson, struck by the air and generosity of his foe, while, as the yawl was cut loose, he said:

"You are as humane as you are brave, to try and save my men."

Then the lieutenant stood near with folded arms, watching the young skipper sail his vessel.

He saw, where others did not, that he was not running back to an anchorage, but what he meant to do he could not understand.

When he swept so near the town, he was at a loss to understand what bold maneuver the skipper intended, and could not withhold his admiration, when he hove round, left his enemies astern, and were slipping away up the river.

"By Neptune's beard! Sir Yankee, but you are a bold and a skillful sailor, and I wish we were quits, and I had you for a luff on board my schooner."

"Thank you, sir; but if I enter the service of the king it will be willingly and not from being forced to do so."

"Well said, and if you will enlist I will do all I can to shield you from harm for your work to-day, and advance you toward the quarter-deck."

"I again thank you, sir; but I have acted as I deemed right, and if taken must accept the consequences, for I would not shield myself from the result by shipping in his Majesty's service."

Then, turning to his men, Bert Brandon told them to stand by the sheet halyards, as they

would have to act promptly in following the circuitous channel of the river.

"There are more soldiers on the point yonder preparing to fire on you, skipper, and they have been signaled to do so doubtless, for they are from the town barracks," said Lieutenant Nelson.

"You had better retire to the cabin, Lieutenant Nelson, for you might be slain by your own men," was the generous answer.

"You mistake me, Sir Yankee, for I will not shun what you dare face; but I will show myself and prevent the firing," and just in time he stepped out and waved his sword, while, recognizing the officer in command, he called out:

"Ahoy, Shackelford! don't fire on a king's officer and a friend!"

"Great God! Nelson, I would have filled you full of lead in a second more, for I supposed that craft was a smuggler or pirate," and the lugger swept out of hearing, while Lieutenant Nelson asked:

"Now, my young shipmate, I would like to ask what you intend to do with me?"

"I have not yet decided, sir, for I see the boats are all following us," was the calm reply, and Bert Brandon looked astern to where a barge filled with soldiers and two men-of-war boats were still in pursuit, dimly seen in the gathering gloom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SAILOR'S THREAT.

"WILL you desert your vessel, sir, for you can go no further?" asked Lieutenant Neal Nelson, as the lugger, under shortened sail, ran slowly alongside of a narrow dock, jutting out from an old stone warehouse that was in ruins.

A beam jutted out from the upper floor, which had been used for lowering and raising freight from a vessel's hold, and against this the lugger's foremast rested.

A number of country people, hearing of the fugitive lugger's run up the river had gathered upon the shore, and some called out boldly:

"Say the word, skipper, and them boats sha'n't take yer."

"I thank you, my friends, but I wish to avoid bloodshed if it can be avoided, and believe that I can do so."

"If not, I will ask your aid, for I am determined to defend my vessel to the last."

The crowd cheered at the answer of the young captain, while Neal Nelson remarked:

"Heaven only knows how you are going to do it."

"I will show you," was the calm reply, and, as the boats came nearer, he hailed in a voice that rung stern and clear over the waters:

"Boats, ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came the answer.

"Rest on your oars where you are, for I wish a parley with you."

"Well, what do you want?" came the bluff answer, and the boats rested on their oars, while all was silent, even the frogs ceasing their croaking and the crickets their cries at the sound of the voices.

"I wish to say that I am at bay, for I can go little further, and if you attempt to attack me I will resist."

"It will do you no good."

"You are mistaken, sir, for there are many brave countrymen here who have volunteered to defend my vessel if necessary."

"We do not fear an unarmed mob," was the defiant reply, and a fierce yell arose from the crowd on shore, which ended as the young skipper demanded silence.

Then he said:

"It is easy for you to send for reinforcements, but while you do others will come to my aid, and a conflict will be the result, which will end in your defeat, for I shall ruin my vessel and retreat inland, so you will not gain your object, which is the capture of my vessel and myself."

"We will at least make the effort," said a stern voice, and then came the order:

"Give way, men!"

"For your lives, hold!" cried the Yankee skipper, and his trumpet voice caused the oarsmen to rest on their blades at once.

"Let me say to you, Sir Leader, that I have here as prisoner, Lieutenant Neal Nelson, and that I do not fear to act, you have already seen, so believe me when I say that I shall hang him up to yonder beam, so help me Heaven, as surely as you press me."

These bold words created consternation in the attacking forces; but Neal Nelson never changed a muscle, though he knew it was no idle threat.

"You would not dare do such a deed," shouted back the leader.

"Do not force me to prove my words, for I respect Lieutenant Nelson as a brave man; but were he the king himself, I would carry out my threat did you defy me."

"Do you believe it, Nelson?"

"I am Major Douglass of the Governor's Guard," said a voice.

"I know it, Douglass, for this Yankee skipper is as firm as Admiral Hood himself, or even Shuldham, and I'll be dancing a jig in mid-air as sure as you attack."

"Still, don't mind me, but do your duty, for a sailor must expect ups and downs in life," was the plucky rejoinder.

"God bless you, Nelson, you've got the grit of a lion; but I'd rather lose a hundred Yankee luggers and their crews, than have you suffer, so I'll draw off," came the response.

"One word, sir!" called out Bert Brandon.

"I hold the winning hand, sir, and I know it; but if you will withdraw to the town, I'll pledge myself to release Lieutenant Nelson in safety before nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Will he do it, Nelson?"

"Yes, if he says so, Shackelford, he surely will, and I vouch for it," came the reply.

"I thank you, sir," said Bert Brandon, while Major Shackelford replied:

"All right, my man, and if you do not keep your word a fearful vengeance shall be visited upon you and your people."

"And if you do not draw off as you pledge yourself to do, but attempt to attack me to-night, I shall kill Lieutenant Nelson at the very first alarm," came the defiant threat.

"I'll withdraw, I promise you," was the sullen reply.

"And all with you?"

"Yes."

"And send no others to attack me?"

"No, you cunning Yankee, no!"

"Then I will keep my pledge, and see to it that you do not force me to keep my threat instead."

"Good-night, Shackelford, and for my sake let no action be taken until the morrow, for I believe in my Yankee friend here."

"It shall be as you wish of course, Nelson, so good-night, and breakfast with me at my quarters in the morning at nine sharp, and I'll have a number of your friends on hand to welcome you out of the lion's den."

"Thank you, I'll be there," was the cheery reply, and as the boats moved away the crowd on shore set up a terrific yell of delight, while a number began to at once board the vessel to see the daring young skipper and his prisoner.

CHAPTER IX.

SAVED BY A FOE.

"I HAVE your permission to enter the cabin, sir," said Lieutenant Nelson, amazed at the staring and remarks of the crowd of country people.

"Certainly, sir, if I have your parole not to attempt to escape," was the answer.

"I give it with pleasure, Skipper Brandon," and so saying the officer entered the neat little cabin of the lugger and interested himself in looking about him.

"This is not the sea home of any common man," he muttered, as he saw a guitar hanging on one side of the companionway, and some book-shelves in one corner, while upon the table were writing material, the lugger's log and some charts of the coast evidently drawn by the young skipper, for one was not yet completed.

Then there were some surveying instruments, and in an open portfolio a number of very artistic pencil sketches, one of the lugger being particularly good.

"The skipper has refined tastes, and talent, too, while his cabin indicates an educated mind, especially when I see such books as he has here for his reading."

"By Jove! he's a genius, a gentleman, and a sailor, every inch of him, and I hope to know him better— Ah! what is that trouble on deck?"

The young officer arose as he spoke, and approached the companionway, for a noisy scene was transpiring on deck.

There were some who did not like the courtesy extended to the Englishman, in allowing him to remain a prisoner upon his simple word, and they wished him to be put in irons or securely bound.

For a while Bert Brandon had paid no attention to these demands, until he saw a very ugly spirit arising among some of the men, and he said in a pleasant way:

"Come, friends, I wish the lugger cleared now, for it is growing late."

"And what is you gwine ter do with that infernal Britisher?" asked a burly fellow, who had evidently come to the scene from some tap-room in Cambridge, as he was under the influence of rum.

"I am going to return him to the town," was the quiet answer.

"Waal, I says no, for them red-coats and king's sailors treats us like we was brutes, and as we has one in our power we'll just make him feel our fury."

"Won't we, mates?" and the man turned to the crowd at his back, who had evidently been nagging him on to say what he did.

"That's so, Pike! Let's hang him!" said one.

"Yes—string him up!"

"But you have not got the prisoner, my friends, so you can do nothing with him," calmly remarked Bert Brandon.

"We helped you to take him, and he's as much ours as yours," said Pike.

"You are mistaken, for the gentleman boarded this vessel of his own free will."

"Well, we saved your vessel, and you from hanging."

"That's so," said a number of voices in chorus.

"You are mistaken, my friends, for the boats kept back not from fear of you, though I do not doubt but that you would have bravely fought for me; but from fear of causing the death of Lieutenant Nelson," and Bert Brandon spoke in the same calm tone as before.

"Well, we has got him now, and we will hang him," cried Pike.

"You have not got him, and if you attempt to lay hands upon him, I will defend him to my utmost strength, was the stern rejoinder."

"Come, mates, he's a good fellow, and we don't wish to hurt him; but there's nobody but him and his two men, so let us take ther Britisher and hang him, and it will scare the English general, Lord Howe, almost to death."

"All right! Take and hang the Britisher!"

"Avenge our comrades who have been seized by the Press-Gang!"

"Seize the Britisher!"

"Kill him!"

"Swing him up!"

"Don't hurt the skipper, but hang his prisoner!"

There was a perfect pandemonium of yells for awhile, and, unheeding the voices of entreaty and warning from the better disposed people, the advocates of mob law pressed forward.

There were fully a score of them, determined young fellows, now that they thought they had all their own way.

Those who would not join them hastened off of the lugger, and cries arose in the crowd ashore to run to Cambridge after the constables.

Perfectly calm, Bert Brandon stood his ground, having placed himself aft, by the cabin companionway.

"She is only fast forward, Potomac?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, Massa Best, only one line out."

"Then if they press us, we will drive this gang ashore and shove off, so whisper what I say to Kennebec."

"Yes, massa."

Then the young captain turned to the crowd, who were now ready for mischief, and said:

"Back, men, for I am on my own deck, and I will stand no trifling," cried Bert Brandon, in a voice that showed he was not going to be browbeaten.

"We don't want ter harm you, skipper; but we does want ter hang ther Britisher, and we intends ter do it, so you jist step one side, fer yer can't help yerself," said the man Pike, who was the ringleader, and he stepped forward.

"Back, I say, for I will kill the man who presses me!"

At this moment Lieutenant Nelson stepped out of the companionway, and he saw the situation at a glance, while, suspecting it, from what he had overheard, he had brought with him the very rapier with which Bert Brandon had disarmed him, and a brace of pistols which he had also found in the cabin.

"I will not use the weapons, except to save my life, skipper, but I place them here for you," he said, as he laid them on top of the sliding hatch of the companionway.

At that moment Pike sprung forward, armed with a musket, and Bert Brandon thrust his hand quickly into his breast-pocket.

It returned with a pistol, and at that instant the man fired, having aimed at the Englishman.

But the weapon had been struck up by the young skipper, the bullet burying itself in the main boom, and the ringleader was felled to the deck by a terrific blow full in the face.

Maddened, he sprung to his feet and clubbing his musket rushed upon Bert Brandon, unheeding his warning to keep back.

Then followed the flash and report of the pistol, the ringleader fell in his tracks, and seizing the rapier from the top of the hatch the young skipper dashed upon the mob, and aided by the Indian and negro cleared the decks in a manner that made the crowd ashore yell their admiration, and excited the wonder and respect of the captive, who stood with folded arms calmly gazing upon the exciting scene.

"Throw the body of that reckless fellow ashore, Potomac, and you, Kennebec, cast off," came the command, as the young skipper stepped to the helm.

As the lugger swung out into the stream and her sails caught the wind, Lieutenant Nelson said earnestly:

"My friend, you saved me from an ignominious death to-night, and I never saw a mob so readily mastered."

"Now place me aboard my vessel, and my word for it, you shall receive pardon for your lawless acts to-day, and can go to sea undisturbed."

"Lieutenant Nelson, I do not admit I have done a lawless act, for if I took life in resisting a Press-Gang, I did but my duty, as I did also in running down your barge to prevent seizure and death at the yard-arm when I had committed no crime."

"To-night I took an American's life to save

you, an Englishman, for I felt I was right in doing so, and while I appreciate your words, and good intentions, I will not take the chances of risking mercy at the hands of either Admiral Shuldham or Lord Howe, so shall land you near the town and then put to sea."

"Great God! would you attempt the same mad act over again?" cried the English officer.

"I have only that to do, sir," was the cool reply, and the young skipper gave orders to his crew to see that all was in readiness for running the gantlet, adding:

"I think, as it is night, we can make it in safety."

"From my soul I hope so! but you never can," said the English officer, as the lugger sped on her way down the river, back toward the city.

CHAPTER X.

THE MERMAID'S FLIGHT.

DOWN the river sailed the fleet lugger, her sails all set and drawing well, while, as if to aid the young skipper in his daring enterprise, the wind had changed around and blew fair for the run out to sea, having also increased to a good ten knot breeze.

"Let me urge that you be not foolhardy, my young friend, and trust to the clemency of the British commander here," said Lieutenant Nelson in a kindly tone, addressing Bert Brandon, as the Mermaid swept out of the river and headed toward the wharves of the town.

"I prefer to take the chances, thank you, Lieutenant Nelson, and attempt to run out," was the reply.

"Then I insist that you do not place yourself in greater danger by running up to the town to put me ashore, for if you will run in close I can jump overboard and readily reach the land."

"You are very kind, sir, to think of my safety; but I rather lessen the danger than increase it, by running around the point here to the town, as the guard-boats below, if they see me, will think I am on some harbor duty, and when I start to run out will naturally imagine I have a permit or would not make the attempt."

"You argue well, Skipper Brandon, but my word for it, if you can pass the frigate before she can bring you to, the sloop-of-war will not fail to open on you, and should she do so, I have a wide-awake officer on my schooner who will pay his compliments with iron salutations, yes, and follow you out to sea, and the Vicious is very fast."

"So is the Mermaid, sir."

"Yes, I have observed that, and with a good start you might drop the Vicious; but then there is the castle to get by, and the numerous guns there will surely sink you."

"It will be a desperate gantlet to run, sir, I admit, if I expected to receive the fire of the ships and the fort; but I half-believe I can almost get out before I am suspected of being the fugitive lugger of the afternoon's adventure."

"But here we are, Lieutenant Nelson, at the wharf, and I will luff sharp, sir, and go by with a shave and very slow, so that you can step off if you will, as I do not care to come to a standstill."

"I can readily spring off, and I wish you success, and that we may again meet under more favorable auspices."

"Good-by," and the lieutenant held out his hand, which Bert Brandon warmly grasped, for he had, after all, found his enemy of the Press-Gang service a most clever gentleman, after he came to know him better.

As the Mermaid glided slowly by the edge of the wharf, her sails fluttering, the lieutenant tossed a well-filled purse to Potomac with the remark:

"Divide that with your red-skin mate, my man, and know that I hold no ill-will to your master, his crew or his vessel."

With a leap he reached the wharf and the Mermaid passed on, while the Englishman stood still watching her.

It was growing late, for ten o'clock had passed, and the lights of the town were, one by one, going out, as the early-to-bed citizens retired, after the exciting scenes of the day.

Upon the vessels at anchor a twinkling light was visible upon each, while they tugged away at their anchors as though envying the lugger gliding among them under sail.

Further down the harbor the frigate loomed up grandly, with the sloop-of-war, which was the station-ship, and the schooner, also showing their bright lights.

Here and there a red light creeping over the water marked a guard-boat on its rounds, and still further distant was the castle, with its many guns, and sentinels on the alert to snuff danger, or mischief in the air.

In the east the skies were brightening as from a distant fire, but soon the moon, on the wane, soared above the horizon, silvering the waters ruffled by the fresh breeze that was blowing.

"The wind is our friend, though the moon is not, lads," said Bert Brandon, as he gazed down the harbor and settled himself for the terrible ordeal before him.

The lugger was gliding along like a witch, every sail drawing, her skipper at the helm, the Indian forward by the fore sheet, and ready to

spring to the jib sheet, while the negro crouched by the main sheet.

She bent gracefully to the wind, and her course, watched by some who were on the alert on the anchored merchant craft, was noted with deepest interest, for they recognized, or thought they did, the fugitive lugger.

In the path of the lugger, as she sped down the harbor, was a guard-boat.

It had eight oarsmen, a coxswain and a midshipman in charge.

In the bow burned a red light, and gently the men rowed over the waters, now becoming brighter under the rising moon.

"My glass, coxswain, for I see a craft, or a phantom one coming down and this after special orders from ashore and afloat not to let a fishing skiff put to sea to-night," said the midshipman.

"I see her, sir, and she is under full rig, and coming along so boldly she must be under orders," answered the coxswain.

"No, or she would carry a red light forward, according to orders."

"What can she be, sir?"

"Some of these fearless Yankee skippers, determined to run out, whether or no."

"It may be the fugitive craft that escaped up the Charles River, sir, for the moonlight shows her to be a lugger."

"Hardly, coxswain, or she would be coming out of the river, and as we came across on our run we saw nothing of a vessel coming out."

"True, sir; but will you challenge her?"

"Indeed will I, for I am working for promotion, and would like to make a clever capture to aid me."

"I see but one person on board, sir, and he is at the helm," and the coxswain was watching the lugger through the midshipman's glass.

The moon was now shining brightly, and the lugger came along at a speed that called forth exclamations of admiration from both the coxswain and the midshipman, the latter remarking:

"She comes along like a bird, her sails are all ataut and belay, and she looks as though she did not intend to start, tack or sheet."

"But we must make her trim, coxswain, and bring her to, and maybe we will be repaid for rowing in these waters off and on for a watch of four mortal hours, when with the war-ships and castle covering the channels nothing can get in or out surely."

"It would seem so, sir; but she holds on as though she did not see us."

"True; her skipper needs waking up, so I will hail," and rising in the boat the midshipman's shrill voice went over the waters with:

"Lugger aboy!"

But the lugger still came on and no response was given to the hail.

"Aho, that lugger! Heave to or I'll fire into you!" shouted the midshipman through his speaking-trumpet.

"Ay, ay, sir!" came in a manly voice from on board the lugger.

Still she held on.

"Drop your oars, men, and get your muskets ready! quick!" cried the midshipman, and six of the oarsmen obeyed, two only retaining their oars to keep the boat on her course.

The boat was lying beading toward the coming lugger, and the midshipman seeing her still standing on, shouted out:

"Luff, you Yankee lubber, luff! or you'll be into us!"

"Starboard, hard a-starboard your helm and come to!"

"Ay, ay, sir, I'll not harm you!" came the clear response from the lugger's helmsman, while the bows, now almost upon the boat, veered off and swept by like a race-horse.

The young officer, and all on board the guard-boat, gave a sigh of relief at seeing the lugger so skillfully avoid what seemed an inevitable collision, and the midshipman cried out:

"Well done, my man! Now heave to astern of us, and I'll forgive you the fright you gave us."

The oarsmen had laid aside their muskets to resume their oars, and all believed that the lugger would immediately come to; but a cry from the coxswain startled the midshipman, who beheld the craft flying on her course, and some distance away.

"Seize your guns, men! You, oarsmen, give way, and coxswain, head her in chase."

"Blast the cunning Yankee, he has given us the slip. Fire!"

The rattle of the six muskets broke rudely over the waters, and the bullets went flying after the lugger.

But still she held on her way.

"Send up a rocket of warning, coxswain, for we can never catch yonder streak of moonlight with oars," ordered the midshipman, and an instant after a rocket, ignited by a lantern, went skurrying its way into the heavens.

"Send up another, and another, coxswain."

"Curse that fellow, he made us believe he was lubberly in coming to, and he was playing with us."

"I'll never take a step up the ladder of fame for this night's work, coxswain."

"No, sir," frankly admitted the coxswain, as he sent up a third rocket.

"That has alarmed them on ship and in fort."

"Hark, hear the bugle-note of alarm and the rattle of the drums."

"See! there goes a rocket up from Copp's Hill, ay, and another from the frigate."

"Pull straight in the flying devil's wake, coxswain, and you'll be in at the death, when the heavy guns knock him out of the water— Hal! there runs a blue light up from Copp's Hill; yes, and another on the schooner Vicious."

"The lads are waking up— Aha! listen to that thunder from the frigate," and a deep boom startled the sleeping town, awakening many an echo along the shores, as the iron shot went flying after the fugitive Mermaid.

"Ah! the sloop is awake, yes, and the schooner too," cried the midshipman, as these vessels also opened fire, and then he added, as the iron flew shrieking over their heads:

"And we are in range, so give way, men, or we will have an iron ball dropping upon our heads."

"Pull hard, for we don't wish to be sacrificed," and the men bent to their oars with a will.

"Hal! the sleepy soldiers are at last aroused from their nap, and the old castle joins her deep basso into the braze-mouthed chorus," cried the midshipman, and a moment after he said:

"Hark! this sounds like a battle of a fleet of frigates!"

"If that lugger escapes this night she is a phantom craft, or the Flying Dutchman in disguise."

CHAPTER XI.

GONE.

IT was the first gun from the frigate that had startled all in Wyndom Castle, and sent Captain Delafield so hastily away.

Upon reaching the cupola, the eyes of the secretary and the two girls soon became accustomed to the change of light, and they beheld the harbor a blaze of glory, as a blue light blazed forth from on board the frigate, and soon after on Copp's Hill, revealing the harbor distinctly and showing at a glance the cause of the firing.

"That desperate fellow is running out by night!"

"Behold! there flies his lugger!" cried Secretary Wyndom, excitedly, pointing to the Mermaid in her flight.

But the keen eyes of both maidens had already fallen upon the fugitive craft, and they knew it at a glance.

They saw her deck lighted up by the burning blue lights, and beheld the tall form of her daring skipper at the helm, with the red-skin and black crouching forward, ready to obey their master's slightest bidding.

They saw the guard-boat, with the midshipman and his crew, and knew that the lugger must have run by it, and without injury.

As they looked, the blue lights faded out, having revealed to the ships and fort just what was going on.

But, knowing the cause of alarm, the gunners could now train their pieces upon the bold mariner who had dared their aim so recklessly.

Their eyes becoming accustomed to the moonlight, the secretary and the maidens now distinctly saw the lugger, without a glass, and they were white with dread as the mansion fairly trembled beneath the roar of the guns of the three vessels, which were sending their iron hail after the fugitive lugger, although they knew she had to run the gantlet of the castle's guns.

"He will never get to sea, father," said Madge.

"If he does it will be a miracle under the terrible cannonading he must yet stand," answered Mr. Wyndom.

"He has escaped thus far, sir," said Lady Lulu.

"Yes, but the ships are at anchor, and not in good position to fire on him."

"See! the schooner is getting up sail!" cried Madge.

"Then he is surely doomed, for the Vicious is very fleet," Mr. Wyndom said.

"I did not observe Lieutenant Nelson on board the lugger, when she was under the glare of the blue lights," Lady Lulu remarked.

"True; I hope no harm has befallen him—but see! the lugger has run up another sail, ay, and there goes another."

The first sail referred to had been run up from the deck, on a stay between the two masts, extending from the foot of the foremast to the head of the mainmast, what was a jib, or stay-sail, and which added to the speed of the lugger.

The second sail was what is called a "driver," and was rigged upon a small mast stepped on the starboard end of the taffrail, and which also increased the fleetness of the Mermaid, which now seemed to fairly fly over the waters instead of gliding through them.

"The crew are throwing water upon the sails with buckets fastened upon long poles, and this too helps her speed," said the secretary, who had a powerful glass to his eye.

"Her skipper seems to bear a charmed life," Uncle Wyndom, Lady Lulu said, striving to be calm, but yet greatly excited at the thrilling sight.

"He does indeed—ha! there goes the castle's guns upon her."

"Hark how they roar!" cried the secretary.

"Heaven have mercy upon that little craft," fervently said Lulu, while Madge breathed an earnest:

"Amen!"

"Oh, this is fearful!" cried Lady Lulu, as the castle's guns thundered forth their appalling peals, and illumined the sea with the red glare of their explosions.

But still the lugger held on her way.

"They do not hit her! they do not estimate her marvelous speed, and all their shots fly astern," the secretary said, with considerable gladness in his voice, for he wished the lugger to escape, as he said:

"That bold young sailor deserves success, and were I the commander of that fort I would order my gunners to cease firing."

"I am so glad to hear you say that, Uncle Wyndom, for, outside of the fact that I owe my life to that brave young American, he would win my admiration, were he an enemy, by his superb courage."

"Yes, and were he to tread a quarter-deck, he'd win your heart, too, I'll warrant, for in faith, I believe both you and Madge are half-smitten with the handsome scamp as it is," said the secretary, slyly.

"Brave little vessel! fly on your way unharmed," cried Lady Lulu, while Madge said quickly:

"There goes the schooner in chase, and see, that is cruel, for her to fire also from her bow guns, when the castle is pouring upon the lugger such a terrible iron hail."

"Pouring it astern of her, Madge, for I do not believe a shot has touched her," the secretary said.

"If she escapes the fort, I have little dread of the schooner overtaking her, for she sails like a witch," Mr. Wyndom added, after a moment.

Suddenly a blue light was burned upon the castle, and once more the moonlight was dimmed by its brilliancy, while the lugger was distinctly revealed.

The secretary had his glass at his eye, as also Madge, and the former said excitedly:

"She has been hit, and often, for her sails are shot-torn in a number of places, while her bulwarks amidships and forward are cut away, and her foretopmast has been carried away."

"Yet she still holds on, and her brave skipper is at the helm holding her on her course," Madge rejoined.

"Yes, and—but I fail to see her, now that the blue light has burned out," said Lady Lulu.

"Egad! I have lost her too; that light blinded me, and I cannot get her exact bearings," Mr. Wyndom said, in a puzzled way.

"Nor can I find her, father."

"Can aught have happened to her?"

"Perhaps the castle has sunk her."

"But the firing still keeps up."

"It is slackening up now, uncle."

"Yes, the castle has ceased firing, niece."

"What can it mean, father?"

"I do not know, unless she has been sunk, and if she has not been, and has escaped, then all Boston will believe she carries a Salem witch as a figure-head."

"I will half believe it myself," Madge remarked, half in earnest.

"Well, she has gone, that is certain; but whether she has escaped or gone down, who can tell?" Lady Lulu said, sadly.

"Well, there goes the schooner, and to-morrow we will know all; but after what I have seen of that man's pluck, I will not believe he has been destroyed on the very verge of success," and the secretary again swept the waters with his glass.

But nowhere was the lugger visible, for she had indeed disappeared as mysteriously as though a witch from Salem had controlled her destinies through the terrible gantlet of iron rain she had been forced to pass through.

CHAPTER XII.

IN DANGER.

WHEN Lieutenant Nelson was left upon the wharf by Bert Brandon, he stood looking after the little vessel a minute, and then muttered:

"He intends to boldly make the attempt, I see; but, though I believe I am a stranger to fear, I would not like to be with him, for it can never be done—Ah! there is a boat putting off from the water stairs, and I verily believe it is from my schooner," and raising his voice, he called:

"Vicious, aboy!"

"Ay, ay, sir! whereaway?" came the response.

"Is that you, Midshipman Vane?"

"Yes, sir; and I think I recognize our commander's voice."

"Give way, men, and we'll go to the stairs yonder," and a moment after the boat touched the stairs upon which Lieutenant Nelson stood.

"Well, lieutenant, this is a glad surprise, for I have just been scouring the town to find out something about you, and here you find me," said the middy, Clarence Vane.

"Yes, Vane, I just landed from a short and exciting cruise," was the dry response.

"You was captured by the lugger, sir?"

"No, I captured the lugger; but she was more than I could hold, so she held me."

"The fact is, Mr. Vane, I have just been released from the lugger by her very polite, skillful and brave skipper, and if you look yonder on the water you will see her trying to do by night what she failed to do by day!"

"Run out, sir?"

"True."

"She can never do it, for orders came to not allow a sail to move on the waters after dark, and the guard-boats are as busy as bees about the harbor."

"Why, I was stopped twice by them coming up the harbor, for Lieutenant Waters sent me to see what I could hear from you."

"Were any of my boat's crew drowned to-day?"

"No, sir, though one had an arm broken and three were some cut and bruised by splinters, while two came pretty near drowning, and, but for the falling of the lugger's yawl into the water several would have lost their lives."

"The yawl was cut loose to save them, Vane; but give way, men, more lively, for I wish to see what happens to the lugger," and at the order of their commander the four oarsmen pulled with a more rapid stroke toward the schooner.

As they neared the vessel the alarm was sent up from the guard-boat, by the three rockets, and answering signals came from Copp's Hill and the ships.

Then the frigate opened, for she lay in a position to partially command the flying vessel.

"The ball has opened, and now for the result," said Lieutenant Nelson.

"They'll blow her out of the water, sir," volunteered the middy.

"Pull, men, for there opens the schooner," cried Neal Nelson, and the boat went rapidly along, urged by the strong arms of the crew.

The firing now became brisk, blue lights were burned, rockets were sent up, lights sparkled in the town, and in the homes along the shores, and all was excitement.

But still on sped the lugger, untouched, it seemed, by shot.

"Ah! there is a signal from the frigate for the Vicious to start in pursuit, for the admiral recognizes that the lugger, sailing as she does, will be hard to hit."

"I am sorry the schooner has to go," he said to himself, as he felt that the capture of the lugger was sure if she did, even though she escaped the fire of the forts.

As the boat ran alongside of the schooner she was under way, having slipped her cable to get off quickly and the crew began to set sail as she went along.

"Ah, lieutenant, I am glad Vane found you, and I welcome you back," cried the junior lieutenant of the Vicious, Rowell Waters.

"I found Vane, Waters, but I thank you for your good wishes."

"You are in chase of the lugger, I see?"

"Yes, I got orders from the frigate to catch her or blow her out of the water; but I see that she is the craft that played with us all this afternoon?"

"She is."

"And Satan is her skipper, from the way she is handled."

"No; he is a young man, as handsome as a picture, brave as a lion, a gentleman, and the best seaman I ever saw on a deck."

"High praise, lieutenant! But I relinquish to you now, sir."

"No; keep command, and I will look on."

"Thank you, sir; but I hope to hear of your adventures soon, and how you escaped."

"I did not escape; I was simply set free."

"Indeed! But I think I will soon be in position to open on the lugger. But, see! she escaped the fire of the frigate, and the sloop, not to speak of the few shots we sent after her, and she is calmly taking the cannonading of the castle as though she did not know she was the object of so many compliments."

"I'll guarantee that her skipper is as unconcerned under that fire as I am here, and I do believe he will get by the castle," said Neal Nelson, watching the lugger through his glass.

"He carries a broom at his fore, sir, and a witch at the helm, or he could never do what he has done," said the boatswain, saluting politely.

"No, bo'sen, the lugger is sailed by a man, and a sailor, every inch of him, while the only piece of femininity I saw about the craft is the little flag, which is a mermaid represented as swimming over the sea, and a pretty piece of work it is, too. But, see! I think she was hit then, though she still holds on."

"Yes, sir; her foretopmast was cut away," answered Waters.

"Yes, and she has been otherwise hard hit, though it does not seem to hurt her sailing qualities."

"I can open on her now, sir, and a raking fire will doubtless be successful," said Lieutenant Rowell Waters.

"I will go forward and act as gunner myself, Waters," and Neal Nelson went forward, cleared

the pivot eighteen-pounder for action, and aiming it himself, fired.

"A good range shot, but too high," he muttered, and again he tried it.

The schooner was now abreast of the fort, which was so enveloped in smoke that the lugger could not be seen from it.

Running swiftly in chase, the bow-pivot kept up a steady fire, but with no result that was satisfactory to her crew, though it might have been to her captain, who was serving as gunner.

"Ha! that last terrific broadside from the fort has knocked her to pieces," cried Neal Nelson, as the lugger seemed to suddenly disappear.

Springing upon the gun he eagerly glanced out over the waters, but the lugger was not visible.

"Ho, the castle!" he shouted through his trumpet for the fort had ceased firing.

"Ay, ay, the Vicious," came the response.

"Your last fire downed her, for she is nowhere in sight."

"The smoke of our guns hides her from us as it rolls over her course."

"But I can see where she was, and saw her the instant before your last broadside."

"If she appears again I will look after her."

"All right, Lieutenant Nelson; but what the deuce is the craft?"

"A lugger with a crew of Salem witches on a pleasure cruise, I guess, from the way she behaves," laughed Nelson, and the schooner swept on out of hearing.

For a quarter of mile she had run, and then the smoke from the fort rolled by and upward, and Midshipman Vane sung out:

"Lugger, ho!"

"Whereaway?"

The middy pointed off the port bow, to where, three-quarters of a mile distant, the lugger was seen flying along with her sails thrown to starboard and hauled well aft.

"By Heaven! that fellow swung off at a direct angle after that last fire of the fort, and that is where we missed him."

"He is the best I ever saw."

"Yes, sir, and he means to run through the island channels, and thus dodge us," said Waters.

"You know better than I do, Waters, so tell me, can he do it?"

"There is not more than six feet, perhaps five, at this tide, but he hardly draws more and might drag through."

"If he grounds, we will have him."

"Yes, sir."

"Then we will not fire now, but wait awhile, to see what he can do."

"If he gets through, sir, he can throw us a long way astern, and get out to sea far ahead of us, and then it is good-by Yankee lugger."

"Well, I'll open fire again."

"No, sir! for he has found he cannot run through, and is putting about."

"You are right, Waters; he sees that he cannot escape, and is coming back to give himself up."

In spite of their discipline the men who heard their commander's words broke forth in a cheer, for if the lugger surrendered it certainly was not a witches' pleasure boat on a cruise, and that relieved their minds greatly.

"Yes, he is coming right down toward us to surrender, that is certain, and as we will have to come to, sir, shall I take in sail?"

"Yes, do so, Waters, for we've got him now."

"He was bold to attempt to run the islands, sir; but I saw that he had two men forward throwing the lead, and all of a sudden they sprung to the sheets and the lugger went about, as though they had suddenly felt the keel grating."

"Well, human endurance and nerve have an end, and I suppose the poor fellow feels he can stand no more and must give up, trusting to me to help him out, and I will," said Neal Nelson to himself, and he raised his glass to his eye to watch the lugger, now coming rapidly toward him.

CHAPTER XIII.

PICKED UP.

THE night was almost as brilliant as day, for the moon, though on the wane, rode in a clear sky.

The wind was blowing a good ten-knot breeze, and the lugger was making all of twelve out of it.

Bending to the wind, as she came back toward the schooner, she flew over the waters like a frightened bird.

Upon her deck her skipper and his crew crouched at their posts in silence, and the little vessel was closely watched by all on board the Vicious, and by no one with more interest than did Neal Nelson feel.

"Poor fellow!" he muttered. "It cuts him to the heart to have to give up; but I am glad I am on board to receive him, and he cannot say the fire of the schooner harmed him any."

As the two vessels drew nearer to each other, it could be seen that the strong breeze caused the schooner to lay down to it until those on the lugger saw her weather copper sheathing glistening like gold.

The Mermaid also had her lee gunwale under water, and was diving along like a fish, while

the two now but a quarter of a mile apart were nearing each other with great velocity.

"I will hail."

So saying Lieutenant Nelson raised his trumpet to his lips, as the lugger drew nearer, and shouted:

"Ho the Mermaid, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the Vicious!"

The answer came back promptly in Bert Brandon's voice, and there was not the shadow of a tremor in the tones.

"His voice don't seem that of a man much alarmed," said Rowell Waters.

"Pass astern of me, while I heave to, and you round to under my lee!" ordered Neal Nelson.

"Ay, ay, Lieutenant Nelson," came the reply.

"Ah, he recognizes me," said the lieutenant, and he at once gave the order to round the schooner to.

The lugger, meanwhile, as ordered, shot by like an arrow, and, as her taffrail got abeam, he gave a low order to ease off the jib and fore sheet gently, while he loosened the main sheet, for it was within reach of his hand, at the same time steering with his knee against the tiller which he had put up a trifle.

This change, which seemed to indicate that her skipper was obeying orders, sent her through the water at a greater velocity than that at which she had been going, when close hauled, and she darted away in a surprisingly swift manner.

The bustle on board the schooner, of laying the topsail to the mast, to bring her to the wind, that the lugger might round to and come alongside, prevented any one on board from observing the little craft for a few moments.

When therefore Neal Nelson looked for the lugger under his quarter, she was not there, and an exclamation of amazement was heard upon all sides, as she was discovered flying along to leeward with a flowing sheet and insolently throwing her slippers in his face in sea parlance.

"Outwitted after all! I might have known it," he said with real chagrin, and then he continued.

"Our guns will not touch her, as we now lie, Waters, so get under way again and we'll give chase; though if she dodges us around yonder island she can slip to sea far ahead of us, and that was Brandon's clever little game."

"Yes, sir, he saw he could not run through the islands, and so let us believe he ran back to give up," said Rowell Waters, after giving orders to let the schooner fall off and catch the wind once more.

"Ahoy the schooner!"

The voice came from the waters, and all eyes were strained to reach for the one who hailed.

"Hereaway, Marsar, right plumb in de sea," came the response to Neal Nelson.

"Whereaway are you?"

"Let the schooner come up until her sails shiver, Waters, and lower away a boat to pick that poor fellow up, for he is off of the lugger."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The schooner, which had barely worn around to get her sails full, was now brought up once more, while a boat was lowered with two oarsmen and Middy Vane in it.

A short row brought them to the swimmer in the sea, and he was picked up.

"Hello, Potomac, it is you, is it?" cried Neal Nelson, as the negro stepped on deck.

"Yas, massa, it's Potomac, sah, and I powerful glad ter see you, sah, for I knows I won't be eated up by de Britishers."

"They would find you a tough morsel to experiment cannibalism upon, Potomac; but have you deserted your ship?"

"Yas, sah, it seems so, tho' I didn't mean ter do it."

"How did it happen asked Neal Nelson, as the boat was hauled up to the davits again and the schooner once more started in chase of the lugger, now a mile away and heading so as to round an island, thus cutting off the fire of the Vicious, and, by drawing far less water than did the larger craft, manage to creep near the land and gain great advantage in distance between them.

"Waal, sah, it happen jist this way, Massa Nelson."

"Yer see, Massa Bert he concluded ter try ther island channel, but it shoal so quick on us, we had ter put about, and as we did, we thought ther keel kinder touch bottom."

"Then I says:

"Massa Bert, yer is gwine ter give up, hain't yer?"

"Thet hain't my style, Potomac," says he, quiet like, though he were heading right back for yer."

"Then he tells Kennebec and me ter stand by ter 'tend ther jib and fore sheet, while he'd look arter ther main sheet, though his arm were broke."

"His arm broken?" asked Neal Nelson, quickly.

"Yas, sir, a piece o' ther taffrail were thrown ag'in' him by a shot from ther frigate, and it knocked him clean down; but he jumped up mighty quick, and said:

"I hain't hurt much, lads, for it are only my left arm as is broke."

"Only his left arm?"

"Yas, massa."

"Well, what then?"

"It were pretty bad broke, I guess, fer it hung down by his side I obsarved, and then I noticed his cheek were bleeding, and I pulled a splinter out of it; but he didn't seem to mind it one bit, and kept on; but the fort cut our foretopsail away arter that, and then one shot tore in our bulwarks amidships, another raked the deck forward, a third jist cut clean through ther companionway, and our sails kinder looked like a pepper-box; but Massa Bert laff so pleasant like and say:

"Boys, it's hot work; but it won't last long."

"And he ran by the fort with that broken arm?" asked Neal Nelson, with increased admiration.

"Yas, sah, he did, and he fooled yer mighty fine when he shot off toward ther islands, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did, I frankly admit."

"I thought you had been knocked to pieces."

Potomac laughed, while Neal Nelson said:

"And you found you could not make it through the islands?"

"No, sah, fer ther tide was ebb, and a leetle too low; but two hours sooner and we jist could have made it."

"And then your master ran down toward us, to get out of his bad scrape, cornered as he was, by making us believe that he intended to surrender?"

"Yas, sah."

"But he cleverly made us round to, and shot away like a bird, leaving us still on the waters."

"Yas, massa."

"And you laughed so heartily you fell overboard?"

"Well, Massa Nelson, not adzactly that, sah, for we got de order ter let off de sheets, and Massa Bert, wid his broke arm, minded de main sheet."

"Den I started aft, and my foot caught in a rope, as de lugger gave a lurch scuppers under, and I went overboard mighty easy."

"I ris up, and I seen dat needer Massa Bert or Kennebec had see me take de water, and I w'd not hail, knowin' my massa w'd put back arter me right off and git cotched; but he knows I is gone now, for I seen de lugger half come about, and den stand on her way when you lowered de boat fer me, so he knowed I were picked up."

"But, Massa Nelson!" and Potomac's voice sunk to a whisper.

"Well, Potomac?"

"Don't put me on de station ship, sah, as a sailor."

"No, Potomac; I will take you with me on the schooner, for I need a good steward."

"Thank you, sah, and I guesses I'll like dat mighty well," and Potomac grinned, as Neal Nelson called to his negro cook and told him to give his new steward some dry clothes and take him under his charge for service on board the schooner.

"Now, Waters, what are our chances to capture the lugger?" asked the young commander, turning to his lieutenant.

"Slim, sir, unless we can cripple him before he can get that island between us, for there is a bar juts out, which he can cross, and we will have to round, so he'll gain over a league on us."

"Then he'll escape, for once he reaches open water he can hug the coast, while we must keep off, and he will give us the slip, especially as it is clouding up."

"Yes, sir, and a blow threatens; but we might cripple him with our forecandle pivot," urged Rowell Waters.

"Try it, though I do not believe that anything can check that fellow when he makes up his mind to go through, for I would have bet the chance of an admiralship against him, and every dollar I own thrown in."

"So would any one else, and the men are very anxious, sir, saying that the negro was thrown off by the witch who is on the craft, to check our pursuit, and they do not wish to chase the lugger further."

"It is not as the men wish, Mr. Waters; but try your gun upon him, and see what you can do," and, as the lieutenant moved forward, he said to himself:

"I have no dread for Brandon now, for I believe he would pass safely under a frigate's broadside."

"He will escape me, and he deserves it, for more iron nerve, superb courage and skill I never saw; but I am really sorry he is wounded," and, as Neal Nelson spoke the bow pivot gun opened fire upon the lugger.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN APPOINTMENT KEPT.

THINKING he could do better than his superior officer had, though he did not say so, Rowell Waters went forward himself to fire the pivot gun, and see if he could not bring the lugger to.

The gunner loaded the piece as he wished, and the officer took long and deliberate aim.

The result was that he came very near the lugger, but missed her.

Again he fired and did not so well.

A third shot went between her masts, causing her foresail to jerk up as it tore through the canvas.

But still the lugger held on with no mortal wound.

A score of shots, fired in rapid succession, the lieutenant sent after the speeding boat, which had crossed the bar and was running for the lee of the island, and then he said:

"There she goes behind the island, and I give it up, for she has escaped."

"Well, Waters, no luck, I see?" said Lieutenant Nelson, as his officer came aft.

"No, sir, he's gone."

"And what do you say about the distance he has gained upon us?"

"He will have, if he runs out to sea now, and we follow, just about four miles lead of us."

"Then it is useless to pursue him further, especially as you know we are not provisioned, for I intended getting supplies aboard to-morrow."

"Head back for our anchorage, and I will report to the admiral in the morning, and then go on to town, for I have an engagement to breakfast with Major Shackelford at nine."

"Now I will get some rest, for I am very tired," and the young commander entered his cabin, partook of some supper that awaited him, and then retired to his state-room to seek much needed rest.

In the mean while the schooner sped on her way back toward her anchorage, running close in to the frowning fort, when a hail came from the officer on duty, who had been watching the maneuvers below with deep interest.

"Ho, the Vicious!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Rowell Waters.

"He dodged you after all?"

"Yes, sir, he played a Yankee trick on us."

"So I saw; it was most clever."

"And we gave him up."

"You were wise, for you could never catch that cunning fellow."

"No, sir, so we all think."

"A line-of-battle ship would never have gotten by us as he did; but he seemed to be never where we aimed; but good-night," and the voice of the officer could hardly be heard as the schooner was passing on.

Arriving at her anchorage she picked up her cable, which she had slipped, and soon the pretty craft was riding at anchor, while the town was once more buried in repose, or at least had put out its lights once more.

At seven o'clock the young commander of the Vicious was called, and he arose in a lazy way and, as the scenes of the night flashed before his mind, said to his negro cook:

"Hallo, Blackstone, where is your assistant that I engaged for you last night, and who answered to the name of Potomac?"

"Massa Cap'n, that nigger am gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, sah, he am nowhar on de ship."

"Blackstone, what does this mean?" asked Neal Nelson in surprise.

"Massa Cap'n, do dat nigger look like me?"

"Well, Blackstone, he does look enough like you to be your brother."

"That de way he played it, sah."

"Played what?"

"I gwine ter tell yer, sah."

"Yer see, he made a heap o' fuss over me, said we was doubtless twin brudders, separated when we was young, and tho' I told him I were borned in Boston, and knowed my mammy was, and daddy too, he say dat were nothin' and he knowed we was brudders, for I was so handsome-looking."

"So, Massa Cap'n, I jist give dat nigger my best uniform sailor clothes ter put on, and told him ter bunk in wid me."

"Den he got sick, he say, and go to de surgeon fer some morphine, and I make him some hot coffee, and hab a cup myself."

"Den, Massa Cap'n, I don't know nothin' more ontill half hour ago when dey woke me up."

"I had a awful headache, and dey tell me de nigger were gone."

"I jump up and I find dere two pieces ob gold he hab put in my cap fer me, and de sailors say he come out jist afore dawn and hab my white cook-cap and apron on, and say de pervisions hadn't come on board, and he hab to go to town to market."

"So, Massa Morgan, de new midshipman, who were officer of de deck, he tell two of de men to git de gig and let him go ashore, dey thinking it were me."

"So, off he go and land at de wharf, and de men wait for him."

"Bimeby a man come, soon arter sun-up, and say to de men dat dey needn't wait no longer, as de nigger was not comin' back."

"So out dey comes and reports, and den dey look up de other nigger, and finds me in de bunk so sound asleep dey find it hard time to wake me up."

"Now, Massa Nelson, dem am de gospil facts o' de case, and what you think?"

Neal Nelson burst out into a hearty laugh and said:

"Blackstone, I think he played the sick dodge

to get the morphine from the surgeon—for you, and not for himself.

"He drugged your coffee, and then, seeing that he looked like you, made a bold stroke for freedom.

"He is as cunning as his master, and has given us the slip equally as cleverly."

"He seem like honest nigger."

"And is, or he would never have left you the gold to pay for your suit he wore off," and Neal Nelson laughed again.

"Well, get me a cup of coffee, Blackstone, for I must report to the admiral, and I shall breakfast in town, so you need cook nothing for me, and half an hour after, the young officer, in full uniform and looking his best, went into his gig alongside, and was rowed to the station-ship, the Nero.

He was greeted most cordially, when recognized, and many questions were asked him as to how he escaped; but he evaded an answer, and went to the cabin to see Captain Delafield, who was just dressing.

"Well, Nelson, the Old Harry was to pay yesterday and last night; but I am glad to see you safe and sound, while I was surprised to learn you had called, as I supposed you were yet a prisoner to that dashing Yankee scamp."

"No, Captain Delafield, he released me, and I wish to make my report to you, as I am on my way to the flagship."

"I'll go with you, and then ashore, for I'm to drive out to Castle Wyndom this morning and see the secretary."

"By the way, I'm invited out to dine, so I'll extend an invitation to you also, for those young ladies, yes, and Wyndom too, will be most anxious to hear all."

Neal Nelson looked embarrassed for a moment, and then he said:

"Captain Delafield, I desired to go to Wyndom Castle, to try and clear myself in the eyes of Lady Lulu and Miss Wyndom, for my hasty conduct of yesterday."

"The fact is, I had just had considerable trouble in impressing some men up-town and was angry."

"Again, I am new in America, and was led to suppose that Americans were a most inferior people, so in this humor I met Brandon, and attempted to take him."

"You know the result, as you do also that he took my sword from me, broke it in twain and threw it into the sea."

"Enraged, I drew my pistol, not upon an unarmed man, as Lady Lulu cuttingly said, for he was armed with a knife in his hand and a small pistol in his sash, which I saw."

"She was very severe upon me, but I wish to see her and thank her for keeping me from killing one of the noblest fellows I ever met, and that he is skillful and brave, you have seen."

"Then you will come out?"

"Yes, sir, and I wish you to pave the way with what I have said, for my position is an awkward one."

"I will do so; but now let us go to the admiral's, and we'll catch him at breakfast, and he lives well."

"No, you go with me to breakfast with Shackelford at the barracks, and I promised to be there at nine sharp."

So the two officers, and friends, were rowed on board the flagship, and the old admiral greeted them cordially and heard the lieutenant's story, laughing heartily at Potomac's escape, and saying, with a brave man's admiration for pluck:

"Well, that young Yankee skipper has courage I never saw surpassed, and to run the gantlet of the castle, with a broken arm, alone should get him a pardon, while I'll get an epaulet for his shoulder if he'll serve the king; but you did not chase him out to sea?"

"No, sir, as it would have been useless, after he doubled so cleverly upon me, throwing me four miles astern."

"True, you did best to return; but were none of your men hurt?"

"Not one, sir, as I found the man he hurled off the deck was picked up by a scavenger boat and returned to the schooner, and the men whom he hurt in running me down, are none of them fatally injured."

"I am glad of it, for it will be the easier to pardon him, and he must become a king's man, especially as I learn he was the fellow who rescued the Lady Lulu Langdon from drowning, when that accursed pirate threw her into the sea."

"Yes, sir, he was the same."

"And he was modest about it, too, not to let her know who he was, or where he could be found, while he would accept no pecuniary reward from the secretary."

"No, admiral, he is not that kind of a man, and Yankee skipper though he is, I found him a perfect gentleman."

"He saved me from being hanged by a mob, and he is entitled to full honor and credit for his miraculous escape."

"I pleaded with him to surrender, and I would do all in my power to get him a pardon; he declined."

"He was not insulting toward the king and his officers?"

"No, sir, not in one word that he uttered."

"Well, try and find his whereabouts in some way, Nelson, and tell him from me that no harm shall befall him if he will come and see me."

"Thank you, admiral," answered the young officer, and soon after the two visitors took their leave, and landing in the town, walked rapidly to the barracks.

A hurrah greeted the arrival of Neal Nelson, who was known to most all of the officers who had been invited to breakfast, and were anxiously awaiting to see if the young skipper would allow him to keep his appointment as he had promised he should.

"Ten minutes late, only, Nelson, and you are welcome, and you too, Captain Delafield," said Major Hal Shackelford, a fine-looking officer of thirty-five, and all joined in a glass of welcome to Neal Nelson, who had met with such a strange adventure, while the "Yankee skipper's" health was drunk with admiration at his courage and success even against themselves, as one who was deserving of all that he had won.

Toward noon Neal Nelson took a carriage and drove out to Castle Wyndom, Captain Delafield having preceded him an hour, and it was with a flushed face that he alighted from the vehicle and lifted the heavy brass knocker upon the massive carved door, for he had not forgotten Lady Lulu's biting words to him the day before and wondered how the beautiful girl would receive him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LIEUTENANT'S STORY.

CAPTAIN DELAFIELD was a good talker, and, somewhat anxious to escape being known as the one who ordered Lieutenant Nelson to pursue and capture the young skipper, when he knew just what Lady Lulu and Madge thought of the affair, he was desirous to put the commander of the Vicious in as good a light as possible.

So, when he drove out to Castle Wyndom, some time ahead of Neal Nelson, he was eagerly greeted by the secretary and the maidens, who were most anxious to know all that he could tell them of the chase of the lugger.

His reception really delighted him, and before he could hardly speak he was asked a dozen questions by each fair maid, the principal one being:

"Did the lugger go down, under the fire of Castle William?"

"She did not."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Oh! how glad I am to know this," came fervently from the lips of the two girls, while Mr. Wyndom said:

"I told the young ladies so, or that firing we afterward heard would not have occurred."

"Do you know, Delafield, they got me back in the cupola, after we had separated for the night, when they heard a dozen or more shots, some half-hour after the castle cease firing."

"That was the saucy little Vicious after the lugger, but Nelson says he could not hit her."

"Nelson?" cried both ladies, in chorus.

"Yes, Neal Nelson."

"Why, I thought he was a prisoner?"

"So he was, Lady Lulu; but he must tell you his own story, for I cannot, and it is a most interesting one I assure you, as you will say when you hear it, for I asked him to come out, taking that liberty, as he said he had an explanation to make to you."

"I think an explanation is necessary, when he went in chase of the young American, after our meeting on the wharf," said Lady Lulu coldly.

"Lady Lulu, I think you wronged Nelson in one thing, for the young skipper was armed, with a knife and pistol, and it wronged the lieutenant to have his men knocked about, one tossed off the dock, and his own sword torn from him, snapped in two and thrown into the water."

"Under impulse he was about to fire upon the skipper, when you so nobly saved his life."

"But Nelson is as brave as a lion, he is a splendid fellow, though impulsive, and I hope you will not be hard upon him."

"Yet he deliberately went in chase of the young man."

"He had orders from the ship to do so, and he had to obey his superior officer."

Here Captain Delafield winced a little, for he was inferring a falsehood, as he meant the ship should be understood flag-ship, and superior officer the admiral, whereas it was his own vessel and himself.

"Did the admiral order him again at night, after his escape to chase the lugger, sir?"

"He arrived on his schooner, Lady Lulu, when she was already under way to chase the lugger, having been signaled to do so; but he must tell you his own story, for he is quite infatuated with the Yankee skipper, I assure you, and Major Shackelford gave Nelson a breakfast this morning at his quarters, and I went with him, and Skipper Bert Brandon's health was drunk with a bumper."

"Indeed!" and Lady Lulu arched her pretty brows, while Madge said in a tone of sarcasm:

"British officers drinking the health of a

Yankee who outwitted, outsailed and out-generated them?"

"Strange, but true, Miss Wyndom, but then we can appreciate courage in a foe, and I never saw it shine forth more grandly than in that same Yankee skipper."

Knowing as they did, that the lugger had escaped, and that the British officer had given Bert Brandon credit for what he had done, both Lady Lulu and Madge Wyndom felt in better humor, and when the name of Lieutenant Nelson was announced by the liveried butler, they received him pleasantly, and Lady Lulu frankly said:

"Forgive my harsh words, Lieutenant Nelson, yesterday, especially as they were uncalled for, after Captain Delafield has told us the Yankee skipper was armed."

"With all my heart I forgive and forget, Lady Lulu; but the skipper was armed, with both pistol and knife, though he had such confidence in himself, and justly, as not to make use of his weapons until he had to, and, when I tell you that he saved me from being hanged last night, by killing the ringleader of a mob, you may know that I feel most friendly toward him."

The secretary and the young ladies were now most curious to know the story, and Neal Nelson told of his adventures, from his receiving orders—here he looked slyly at Captain Delafield—to go and capture the lugger, until his being cleverly foiled in her capture by Bert Brandon's daring act at the very moment, as he supposed, of his success.

He gave the young skipper credit for his wonderful nerve, his untiring endurance, his brilliant plans to extricate himself, his unsurpassed courage, and through all for a coolness that no peril could ruffle.

"Without boasting, I may say, and I think the captain will sustain me in what I say, I have been considered the best swordsman in the service; but yet that young skipper disarmed me with his knife on the wharf, and afterward on board his vessel with a rapier."

"When he fired upon the leader of that mob, he hit him squarely in the forehead, and I never saw a deck cleared as those three men cleared it of that angry mob."

"He threatened to hang me in the coolest manner possible, and Shackelford said he knew by the man's voice he would do it."

"No one expected he would dare attempt to run out by night, yet orders had been given to not let a sail move on the bay, and an expedition of boats was to go up and attack him this morning."

"He went off cheerily, after leaving me on the wharf, played with the guard-boats—for I saw the middy in command of the one that tried to bring him to—and took the fire of the ships, the fort, and my schooner."

"He was hard hit, but still held on, and with a broken arm ran by Castle William."

"Then he deceived me completely, running right back to me when he found he could not get through the islands, and answered my hail promptly, to dart away like a bird, and leave me rounded to."

"Half of his crew, in the person of the negro, Potomac, he lost overboard, and I picked him up, and he proved to possess the qualities of his master in a wonderful degree," and Lieutenant Nelson went on to tell of the negro's escape, and the gold pieces he had left to pay Blackstone, his sable-colored *confrere* for his clothes.

"I have told my story to the admiral, and he declares that he will appoint Skipper Bert Brandon to a midshipman's berth, and apply to the king to commission him, while, Mr. Secretary, I wish to ask your influence to get him a pardon for what he has done, in resisting his Majesty's officers and running down a king's boat."

"Gladly will I do all in my power for the young man, Lieutenant Nelson, while, if he does not care to enter the service, I can offer him a civil position of some kind."

"In fact, Lord Howe desires a military secretary; and asked me to look about for a young American who could fill such a position, as he thought it would be a rap to the colonists, to have one of their number appointed, and he does not care to take any British officer from his duties, either naval or military."

"I only hope he is not a fire-eating colonist, who will stand in his own light by expressing his hatred of all that is English from the king down to his British-born subjects," said Captain Delafield.

"I do not think you will find him so, for in what he did, it was not resistance against the king, but rather that he would not be seized and forced to serve against his will."

"Such I gleaned from him, as also that he owned the lugger, and supported those depending upon him by running her as a coaster between the Kennebec and Boston."

"Well, we must find him," said the secretary.

"Yes, we must," added Captain Delafield.

"If they don't, we will," in *sotto voce* said Lady Lulu, with a knowing glance at Madge.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

As Potomac had stated to Lieutenant Nelson, when he was picked out of the water and taken.

on board the schooner, neither Bert Brandon nor Kennebec had noticed his going overboard.

At the moment, the young skipper had his eyes astern, and the Indian was giving the jib halyard a better turn around the cleat.

Potomac's foot had caught on a coil of rope, just as the lugger gave a fearful lurch, and he had gone in head-first.

The negro's presence of mind had caused him to dive deep, to avoid the suction of the hull, and when he arose the lugger was half a cable's length away.

To hail her, he knew would cause her capture, as Bert Brandon would surely put back for him.

The schooner was not so very far away, and he would hail her, for, if made prisoner, it would trouble him but little.

If the schooner did not pick him up Potomac had confidence in his ability to reach an island by swimming, for he was almost as much at home in the water as a fish.

Hailing the schooner he was picked up, as the reader has seen.

In the meantime the lugger was dashing along, keeled far over and carrying full sail in what was really a reefing breeze.

"I shall scud through a break in the bar, which I know of, lads, and put that island between us and danger, while the schooner will have to round the bar point, and thus lose miles," called out Bert Brandon.

"Yes," said Kennebec, as was his wont, though no reply came from where Potomac was supposed to be.

"After we round the island," continued the skipper, "the wind will be astern, and we can run before it out to sea, and then keep under the lee of the land on our way home, and I shall run close inshore and not have to reef."

"When we get over the bar, Potomac, with the breeze aft, I wish you to take the helm, while Kennebec helps me with my arm, which is very painful."

Still no reply from Potomac, and Kennebec, knowing the promptness with which the negro always replied to his master, said:

"Potomac sleep."

"Poor fellow, he needs rest; but where is he?"

The Indian glanced about him, arose, and then said:

"Potomac gone!"

It was not often that Kennebec showed surprise at anything; but this time he was really excited with astonishment!

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"But where?"

"Dunno."

"Is he not in the fore-castle?"

"No."

"In the hold?"

"Hatch shut tight."

"He certainly has not gone into the cabin or I should have seen him."

"No."

"In the caboose?"

"Empty."

"Then he has gone overboard."

"Great God! have I lost the noble fellow?"

"Guess so."

"He must have just gone overboard, so, broken armed though I am, I will put back for him, if I am taken and hanged for it," said the young Yankee skipper to the Indian.

"Stand by to go about!"

The lugger began to go about, as the Indian had run rapidly to the fore sheet and jib, while the skipper, one-armed though he was, tended the main sheet, when Kennebec called out:

"Him all right! Schooner pick him up with boat."

A glance astern showed that a boat had been lowered, and that the schooner had rounded to once more.

"Well, he is not drowned, I am glad to know, and he'll soon escape from them, so we will run once more, Kennebec, and a hard run we'll have of it, crippled as I am."

"Me jump lively—do heap!" was the laconic reply.

"I know your willingness may be good, Kennebec, but this is a good vessel for one man and a half to manage."

"Where half man?"

"I am, with the broken arm."

"Have one arm, one leg, one eye, more man in sea chief than most men Kennebec knows," was the complimentary rejoinder of the Indian.

"You are very good to say so, my good Kennebec, but I am suffering very much, and, as soon as we get through the cut in the bar, I will ask you to take the helm."

In a few moments more the schooner opened fire, as the reader will remember, but other than a shot through her foresail, she suffered no damage, ran through the cut in safety, though her keel slightly touched the sandy bottom, and she dragged aboard over the stern a heavy following sea.

But she went through all right, and soon was running before the wind seaward, and out of sight of the Vicious.

"Schooner going back," said Kennebec, as he saw her sails over the island heading for the town.

"I believe you are right, Kennebec," said the

young sailor, and soon after he became convinced that the Vicious had given up the chase.

Not knowing but that he would meet some English vessel-of-war running in that night bring him to, he determined to run on out to sea, throw his sails to starboard, and head for home with all speed, holding on until he reached Salem, which port he could enter and see a surgeon about his arm.

It was just dawn when he dropped anchor in the port, and leaving Kennebec in charge, went ashore to look up a physician.

The home of one was found, but the doctor had just been called away, and the young man was forced to wait for him a couple of hours.

Then the man of surgery returned and investigated his injuries.

Bert Brandon knew him as a colonist whose sympathies were all with the American people, and when he was asked:

"How did you come by this broken arm, my friend?" he answered frankly:

"Running the gantlet of the British fire last night, in my determination not to be seized by a Press-Gang."

"No! What? You did? Glorious! Glorious!"

"You did well, my brave sir, you did nobly, and I must know all about it," cried the delighted physician.

"It is easily told, sir," said Bert Brandon with a smile at the doctor's enthusiasm.

"Then tell it, please; but what was all that heavy firing about last night, in Boston Harbor?"

"They were trying to sink my little lugger, sir, but she is no worse hurt than am I," and the skipper told the story of his adventures, in a quiet, modest way, from the attack upon him by Lieutenant Nelson, only he did not refer to Lady Lulu in any way, simply saying that the English officer had been prevented from shooting him.

The doctor listened with delight, ejaculating the while as certain events referred to won his admiration.

Then, having all in readiness for work, he extracted several splinters from the face of the young hero, and set the broken arm with the greatest care, bandaging it skillfully.

"Now, my friend, you must get other help to take your vessel back, and you simply command, for I wish that arm of yours to be as good as new in a short while."

"You stand pain with marvelous fortitude, and now you need a good drink of brandy, and I have already told wife you would join me at breakfast."

"Then I will drive you down to the shore and we will look up some good sailor I know."

"You are very good to me, sir, and now I would like to know what I am indebted to you in a pecuniary way?"

"Not one penny, sir, not a copper centime, for it has been a pleasure to serve you, and I hope to see more of you before I die, and if I don't, I am sure I'll hear of you, for you will not be idle when the call comes for patriot Americans to fly to arms against Englishmen."

"And it's coming, sir, coming, and very soon too."

"Now we will go to breakfast."

And such a breakfast as the good wife gave them, for the doctor had run out and told her a part of his patient's story, and she had prepared the best in the house.

Getting into the gig with him, after breakfast, Bert Brandon rode down to the shore, arriving there just as a tall form came rapidly down the road.

"By all that's good! there is Potomac!" cried Bert Brandon, delightedly, and the negro came rushing forward and grasped his hand.

"How did you get here, Potomac?" asked the young sailor in uniform.

"Massa Bert, I jist concluded I w'dn't stay on board dat skunner, and so I lighted out."

"I tuk ther road ter this village, wishing ter git here in daytime, and thinking maybe you might put in here, as yer said yer wanted ter have yer arm mended, and ef I didn't find yer, I intended footing it on ter ther Kennebec, and I hain't lost no time so far, for it's jist about three hours since I left Bosting town."

"Well, I am delighted to see you, Potomac, and I'll hear all that has happened to you, as we sail homeward, for I fear some vessel may run out by daylight and catch us, so we must be off."

Getting a boatman to take them off to the lugger, which lay in a secluded spot, the doctor went along too, and he was profuse in his praise as he saw how the little vessel had weathered the iron storm that had burst upon her, and yet not been struck in a vital part.

"I wish you good luck ever, Captain Brandon, you and yours, and I'll keep your name in mind, expecting to hear it again, while, by the way," he added in a whisper:

"I'm pretty well fixed financially, and if you think of fitting out a privateer to command, when the tug comes, just call on me, for I'll help with funds."

"I thank you, sir; but I have made no plans for the future."

"Good-by," and Kennebec having gotten

things ship-shape while the skipper was absent, the anchor was hauled up and the little Mermaid went flying seaward, homeward bound.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOME ON THE KENNEBEC.

THE scene of my story changes to the present State of Maine, at a point below the pretty town of Bath upon the Kennebec River.

There is to be found a very romantic cove, making into the shore from the Kennebec, and shaped somewhat like the letter J.

The cove runs in between high rocky shores, through an entrance not very wide, but with plenty of water to float a vessel of a hundred tons.

Upon the tops of the overhanging cliffs are firs, lichens, and pines, which fringe the edges and cast the little basin in deep shadow about half the day.

It is a wild, picturesque spot, and at the inner end of the cave the hills tower almost to mountain height.

Into the cave, at its land end, flowed a crystal stream, which came bounding down the rocky steeps, keeping up a steady and musical ripple that was very soothing.

On one side of the stream where it emptied into the basin, was a small pier of logs, over which was a roof, and upon either side rustic seats had been placed.

A sandy beach of only a few feet had upon it a life skiff, and yawl, with a fisher-boat of one ton burden and a single mast lying at anchor near.

From the little dock steps led up the hillside, following the winding stream, and with a railing of saplings upon either side.

Where the rocks served as steps, they had been made use of, but in other places hewn logs had been placed in position, and again board stairways here and there were seen.

At the top of the steps, a hundred in number, upon a level plot of land, a quarter of an acre in size, stood a pretty little cottage of logs.

It was one story in height, contained four rooms, and a small kitchen, wood-house and store-room in the rear.

It was whitewashed neatly, as was also a smaller cabin further back in a glen, where a patient cow stood, awaiting the coming of the milkmaid, for it was nearly the sunset hour.

There were chickens roaming about the hill-sides, a paling fence inclosed a vegetable garden, piles of cut wood stood near the out-house, and an overhanging cliff sheltered all from the cold blasts of the north and the disagreeable east winds, while the sunshine fell upon the little plateau during much of its westward course across the heavens.

Flower beds, trailing vines and rustic seats under a huge fir tree, with a porch running across the front of the cabin, gave the place, with its other attractions, a most home-like, cozy look, and it was an abiding place where one could dream life away without a care.

A path led along the steep hillside from the plateau, under the overhanging walls of rocks, here and there crevices spanned by rude bridges, and one passing along it looked down into the basin below, or up to the pine-fringed cliffs overhead.

A walk, the length of the basin, or inlet, brought one to a jutting point of rocks overhanging the Kennebec River.

Here was a snug little arbor shut in with glass windows that could be raised or closed at will.

A tiny fireplace was in the land side, and upon the hearth of rocks, were two iron dogs for wood.

Then there was a table, and several chairs, the place being evidently a favorite resort by winter or summer, for it commanded a view up and down the river for quite a distance.

The windows were open now, to admit of the balmy breeze, and the little arbor contained two occupants, while outside a large dog, of the Newfoundland breed, and two immense cats lay sunning themselves in the last rays of the setting sun.

Those who were seated in the arbor were, as their appearance indicated, mother and daughter.

The former was a woman of forty-five, with a dignified, sad face, full of refinement and intelligence.

She looked the lady in spite of her rude surroundings, and her dress though of plain jeans was neat and fitted her form well.

She was engaged in knitting woolen socks, and worked with the air of one who enjoyed what she was doing.

The daughter was a maiden of eighteen, with a face full of fascination in its innocent loveliness.

Her eyes were black, large and intensely expressive, while her hair was golden and was coiled in heavy braids at the back of her shapely head.

Her lips were full, red as a rose, and parting as she spoke to her mother, displayed teeth of the whitest.

Her hands were small, though browned by the sun, and the beauty of her feet was not hidden in a pair of stout shoes that she wore.

Though dressed in a home-made gown, of home-made material, with simply a ruffe at her neck, she looked the lady of refinement, though her home was an humble cabin on the river bank.

"Ah, Watch, what is it?" said the mother as the large dog raised his head in an inquiring way.

"Do you see master's lugger coming, Watch?" asked the maiden, and at her words the dog sprang to his feet with a joyful yelp, which startled the two cats from their nap.

"You are right, Watch, there comes the Mermaid," cried the girl, as a vessel suddenly appeared in view coming up the river, and instantly she threw down the sewing she had been engaged upon, and seizing a little blue flag, hoisted it upon a flagstaff that stood upon the cliff.

The flag was of blue, and neatly embroidered in its center in white letters, were the words:

"WELCOME HOME."

Instantly the flag of the lugger was dipped three times in acknowledgment, and, taking a rustic seat outside, the mother and daughter watched for the coming nearer of the little vessel.

"Something has detained Bert, mother, beyond his time, for, with the fair winds we have had the past week, he should have been here three days ago," said the maiden.

"I have feared that harm had befallen him, Bessie, though I would not say so to you; but I am glad to see him back again, as I have been most anxious regarding his safety, since the British have been seizing our seamen as they have."

"I wish brother would give up the sea and take the village school, which was offered to him, until all this trouble is over," Bessie Brandon said.

"I wish so, too, my child; but you know your brother's adventurous spirit craves excitement and he loves the sea, and it is well that he does, for what would have become of us, after your father's mysterious disappearance, had not Bert been able to take charge of the lugger?"

"It was the best he could do; but you will never speak of father as lost, or dead, mother, only as having disappeared."

"I do not believe he is dead, and have never believed he was lost at sea, the night he went out in his skiff to fish on the river."

"I have tried to believe him dead, to picture him at the bottom of the sea, or in his grave, but I cannot do so, and so I live with hope of his return some day."

"Heaven grant it, mother; but he has been gone five years now."

"True, and yet I give not up hope."

"Nor shall I, my brave, noble mother, until there is no longer hope; but, mother, tell me more of my father, for you have never spoken of his past."

A shadow passed over the face of the woman, but she said:

"Bessie, all I know of your father, you know."

"He came into the village where was my home, one afternoon late, and Providence brought him there just at the right moment, as a huge dog rushed from a yard directly upon me, springing at my throat."

"The brute's weight knocked me down and his heavy body fell upon me; but I had heard the crack of a pistol, and the moment before had seen a young man, travel-stained and weary, plodding along the road."

"He it was who had fired the shot, that penetrated the dog's brain just as his fierce teeth glittered in my face."

"He dragged the dog off of me, raised me tenderly in his arms, and supported me to my home, which was near, where my father, who had seen all, met me, white with terror."

"Throwing myself into my father's arms I fainted, and he bore me into the house; but when I recovered from my swoon and asked for my preserver, he had not been thought of, not a word of thanks had I given him even, and he was gone."

"My father tried hard to find him, that he might reward him handsomely, for you know your grandfather was a very rich man, Bessie; but we could learn nothing of who he was, or where he had gone."

"A year after we went to the college where my brother was to graduate, and there I came face to face with my preserver."

"He was a professor there, but no one knew aught regarding him."

"A splendid looking man, as you know your father was, for your brother is his counterpart, a gentleman, too, and owing him my life, it was no wonder I loved him."

"My brother invited him home, to spend a few weeks of vacation, and he came, and loving me, asked my father for my hand."

"Instantly my stern father turned him out of doors, and it was a year before I saw him again."

"Then he came to me, told me that he had a small school on the Kennebec River, which he was to take charge of, and asked me to become his wife and go there with him."

"Again my father stormed; but I became his

wife, though I was disowned, and I never had cause to regret my act, Bessie."

"Poor as we were, your father, who was a good seaman, found he could do better as mate of a vessel, and after two years he became its master, and then was able to buy the lugger."

"Educated as he was, he has taught both you and your brother, until to-day no college graduate is better informed than is Bert, and, like your father, he is worthy of a far better position than the skipper of a coasting-craft."

"But we were left so poor, and Bert has done so well, that we cannot complain, and I do not."

"No, no, mother, I am very happy here in our little nook on the river, and Bert is making money, and has said we should yet move to Boston and have a fine home. But see, the Mermaid is almost here," and both turned their eyes upon the little vessel, which was now almost off the entrance to the basin among the rocks.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RETURN.

"THERE is something wrong with the lugger, mother," said Bessie Brandon, who had been so interested in her mother's story about her father—though she had often heard it before, that she had not attentively regarded the vessel as it neared the cave.

"So there is, Bessie, for her fore-topmast is gone, her taffrail is cut away, and her bulwarks have been stove in several places."

"What terrible weather Bert must have had, though here it has been delightful."

Bessie had taken a spy-glass from the brackets in the little cliff house, and leveled it at the lugger, which was a third of a mile distant.

"Mother, those are shot-marks, and the lugger is scored in many places, while her sails are torn; but there is brother and his faithful crew, so they are all right, though they seem to have passed through a fiery ordeal."

"Yes, I can see now that the lugger has been in trouble, but she luffs up outside and rounds to, so that means she is not coming into the basin," and Mrs. Brandon looked really alarmed.

Bessie had made another discovery, but this she had not spoken of, fearing to alarm her mother.

This was that though her brother had tried to hide it, his left arm was worn in a sling.

"I will run down to the dock and meet brother, for, I suppose after landing he intends to run on up to town with the lugger," and so saying the young girl bounded away, while her mother awaited at the lookout, or as they called the little arbor, the light-house, for it was the custom of the young sailor to keep a light burning there at night, for the aid of any one on the river in darkness and storm, and Bessie was the "Fair Maid of the Light-house," as Bert called her, and never failed to attend it regularly.

She tripped lightly down the stairway to the basin; but as she reached the little dock she heard her mother's voice from above calling her.

"Yes, mother!"

"Bert has hailed and says you are to come out in the skiff after him, as they have lost their boat."

"Yes, I'll go at once," and the skiff was shoved into the water; the maiden sprang into it, and seizing the oars sent it rapidly along, wondering as she did so what could have happened.

"Oh, Bess, I had to call on you to set me ashore, as our boat is gone, and I will let the boys run the lugger on up to town with her cargo, while I land," cried Bert Brandon, as his sister neared them.

A moment more she was upon the deck, while Potomac grasped the skiff.

"Brother, what has happened?" she said, as she saw his pale face, scarred with fresh wounds, and his left arm in bandages.

"It is a long story, sis; but don't be alarmed, for I am all right, though feeling worn out and bruised after our mishaps and run up."

"Now, boys, take the Mermaid in to her dock, and when you unload her, let Builder Wright put her in trim for me from keel to topmast."

"Tell him I wish a longer main boom and gaff, as long as she will stand, and five feet more height to the new topmasts, with fully seven to the bowsprit, and a new set of sails throughout."

"Why, brother, what do you intend to do?" asked Bessie, with surprise.

"Get more speed out of the Mermaid, Bess, and I can do it, though she can show a clean pair of heels to any craft I have yet seen."

"To give her better luck, I shall also call her Mermaid Bessie."

"Oh, brother!"

"True, and when she is changed a little in her bow, and wholly in her rig, you'll find she will be the queen of the waters; but now we will go ashore."

"Good-by, lads, and expect me up in a few days, so do not lose any time in getting the Mermaid in Wright's hands."

"No, the lugger be all right; hope you get well quick," said Kennebec, while Potomac rejoined

"Yas, Massa Bert, you need fixin' up more den de lugger, sah."

Bert Brandon laughed, and replied:

"Oh, I'll soon be all right."

Then Bessie sent the skiff shoreward, and as they reached the dock, Mrs. Brandon met them there, for she too had seen that her son was wounded.

"My noble boy! thank God it is no worse," she said fervently, as she greeted him.

"It's only a broken arm, mother, and a few splinter scratches on my face and neck, so do not worry."

"But you look pale and haggard, so lean on me going up the stairs, and Bessie will aid you, too."

"Oh, no, mother, thank you, I am all right," and the young sailor briskly ascended the many steps to the top; but it was evident that he was suffering, and by no means well.

"Thank heaven, I am at home again, and can rest," he said, as he dropped into an easy-chair, while Bessie lighted a lamp, and made things look comfortable.

The room was a large and cheerful one, evidently the sitting-room of the little home.

There were pictures hanging upon the wall, both paintings and pencil sketches, with skillfully carved frames, the artistic work being the handiwork of Bessie, and the frames having been made by Kennebec.

A rag carpet was upon the floor, there was a sofa, some easy-chairs, a center table beneath a swinging ship's lamp; some book shelves in which were a number of volumes, and upon the mantel a number of curiosities from the sea and land.

In the back of the room was a large stone fireplace, and upon two sides doors opened into the sleeping-rooms.

A door in the back of the sitting-room, and to the right of the fireplace, led into the large kitchen and dining-room combined, and all, including the two bed-rooms, were neatly, though plainly furnished.

The room on the left was the young sailor's, and with its swinging cot and ship furniture, looked more like the cabin of a vessel than the bedchamber of a house.

The other room was where Mrs. Brandon slept, and opening from it was a smaller one which was Bessie's.

Altogether it was a delightful, though humble little home, and with game from the forests, fish from the river, and a well-filled larder, they certainly lived most contentedly, though the frequent absences of Bert Brandon from home was a source of regret to his mother and sister.

The young sailor, during his father's life, had been sent to an academy in Boston, and thus had learned the bay most thoroughly, for his leisure hours were spent in a sail-boat gliding over its waters.

He had made several deep-sea voyages to southern ports, and also to England and the West Indies, and thus had become a thorough sailor, going as mate of a barque when but eighteen years of age.

His home being but several leagues from the sea, he had run out in his little sloop and learned the coast most thoroughly.

Being an educated man, Mr. Brandon had taught his son and daughter most carefully, and in it was aided by his wife, until they had received an education such as, in that early day, few of the children of the wealthiest colonists could boast of having.

Mr. Brandon was also possessed of a military education, and had been a sailor as well, so Bert was taught navigation, all the duties on board a man-of-war, from the foremast band to the admiral, while showing a wonderful aptness in the use of arms, he became such an expert swordsman that he could easily disarm his father, who was a master at fence, while no deader shot with rifle and pistol was known along the coast.

After the death of his father, or the disappearance, whichever it was, for his fate was shrouded in mystery, the young sailor found that it devolved upon him to support his mother and sister.

It was supposed that Mr. Brandon had accumulated and laid aside a snug little sum of money; but no trace of it could be found, and so Bert turned his attention toward the sea as the best means to gain a livelihood for those dependent upon him.

He had known Kennebec from his boyhood, hunted, fished, and explored the coast with him, and Potomac he had befriended, so that these two formed his crew for his little trading lugger.

He made a good living by his voyages, running eight months in the year, and laying up in the winter, the Mermaid being housed over in the cove, and the Indian and negro making their home on board, while the skipper devoted his time to reading, studying, drawing maps, fencing with his crew, both of whom he had taught to fence, and also with Bessie, who handled a blade most skillfully.

Thus was life gliding away in the home of the Brandons, when one night the lugger, in running to an anchorage in Boston Harbor, happened to be in the right place to save Lady Lulu Langdon from being carried off by her reckless

lover, and saving her from death when the treacherous Ravel had thrown her into the sea.

Strange to say, Bert Brandon had not spoken of this adventure to either his mother or sister, and yet he seemed not to have forgotten it, for the image of the beautiful Lulu seemed ever before him.

When she canceled the debt by saving his life it seemed to cut him to the quick, and he would have given much had the affair on the dock not occurred, that he might still feel that she would regard herself as his debtor for what she could not repay.

Still he was not ungenerous in this, for his was too noble a nature to be guilty of a mean act; only he wished to feel that he had saved one so beautiful as was Lady Lulu, and, where she could not give gold as a recompense, she must at least think of him with sincere respect and gratitude.

"She has had cause to remember me now," he had muttered to himself, after his desperate gantlet was run, and he felt that Lieutenant Nelson would tell all that had occurred.

And to his mother and sister he told his story, from his meeting with the Press-Gang, to his running into the Kennebec on his return home.

They listened with deepest interest and amazement to his story, and when his mother said:

"My boy, I fear you were very, very reckless, when you knew that you are all we have to love," he answered:

"Mother, now I have some good news for you."

"In the first place, the cargo I took down was a venture, you know, of my own, and there happened to be treble what I expected realized on the sale."

"This I shall devote to changing the Mermaid's model a little, and refitting her wholly."

"Then in Boston I met an old friend of father's, and who has been away off in China for years with his vessel, a clipper ship."

"Now, mother, he said father put half the price of the vessel in with him, when he bought it, and they took the venture together, and it has turned out so well that he gave me, when I told him of father's death—"

"Loss, my son."

"Yes, mother, his loss, for I too have hope he may return some day; but, as I said, Captain Rendon Fenton told me the investment was made by father in my name, and the receipts as my share, of the cruise, were even more than had been invested as my share."

"I deposited this money, mother, so you see we are almost rich, I may say, and, but for the trouble that is brewing, I would say that you and Bessie should go at once to Boston to live, though as it is, I think you had better remain here for the present."

The news brought by the son and brother gladdened the hearts of all, while Mrs. Brandon said:

"I think we had better remain here for awhile, my son, for it does seem, from what I have heard of late, that the colonists mean to go to war with the British."

"They do, mother, and even now we are on the verge of a volcano."

"And you, my son, what will you do?"

"I shall keep up my trading trips in the Mermaid, mother, until hostilities begin."

"Dare you venture again into Boston Harbor, my son?"

"Oh, yes, mother, for they'll not know the Mermaid Bessie under her new name and rig."

"And if war breaks out?"

"I have not decided, mother, and we will wait and see," was the somewhat evasive reply of the young skipper.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INNEPER'S DAUGHTER.

THE days glided slowly away to Bert Brandon, as he waited for the completion of the refitting and repairing of the Mermaid Bessie, and his arm to get strong again.

So well had the Salem doctor set it and bandaged it that it gave him no trouble, while his perfect health caused the bone to knit quickly, and his wounds to heal.

The week of perfect rest he passed at home helped him greatly, and then he took to running up to town in the skiff each day to look after his vessel.

He had sent up his plans and models to the builder, who was greatly pleased with them, and the bow of the lugger had been sharpened, added to, and raised a couple of feet.

The bulwarks had been strengthened and made higher, and the stern also improved upon, so that the lugger had been given some ten feet more in length.

The mainmast had been placed further aft and this gave more expanse for the foresail, while the new topmasts made her spread of canvas more than much greater.

Then came the mainsail, which was far larger, to fit the new spars, and the bowsprit was ten feet longer than the old one, so that the new sails of the vessel would have an area very nearly double what she had carried before.

Painted black, with a red ribbon running

from bow to stern, the hull looked as graceful as a yacht, and as an old sailor remarked:

"Only wanted guns on board to make of her as trim a small cruiser as floats."

Bessie had made for her a new set of colors, and a figure-head of a mermaid, and a most artistic piece of work it was, too, added to the beauty of the craft.

Among the many applications to ship on the lugger, Bert Brandon had selected two young men, brothers, whom he knew to be perfect seamen, and a boy of fourteen, who had been the only survivor of a wreck on the coast, and to which he had swum out himself and rescued him some years before my story opens.

The boy said he had run away from his home in England, and been cabin-boy in the wrecked vessel, and until he could hear from his friends in England, to whom he had written, Bert Brandon had left him in the care of the village school-teacher, who asked the young sailor to take him, as he was utterly incorrigible, and could not be managed.

"I'll take you with me on the Mermaid, Imp, if you'll behave yourself," said Bert Brandon, addressing the boy by the name which the youngster had said they called him on board the vessel that had been wrecked.

"Captain Brandon, I'm not so bad as they make me out; but I have cut up pranks, hoping they'd let me go to sea to get rid of me, and I would take me with you," said the youth, who was a bright-faced lad, with as much mischief in his composition as would supply half a dozen ordinary boys.

And so the crew of the Mermaid Bessie was made up, and Bert Brandon felt that he could depend upon each and every one.

The vessel being at last ready for sea, it was given out that she would sail upon a certain day, and freight and passengers would be taken.

The clouds of anticipated war were becoming more threatening each day, and rumors came with every vessel arriving in the river that the British in Boston were increasing their forces on sea and land, while seamen were impressed from every American vessel.

So a great interest was felt in the sailing of the Mermaid Bessie under her daring commander.

There had been several Kennebec craft in port when Bert Brandon had made his desperate run, and resisted impressment, and coming home they had told how bravely it was done, how Bert had saved a young noble lady's life, and she in turn had saved him from death, and the young skipper had shot the leader of a mob to protect his British prisoner.

This made the young sailor a hero in the Kennebec, and many went down to "The Nook," as the Brandon home was called, to congratulate the mother upon the deeds of her splendid son.

In this way both Mrs. Brandon and Bessie heard of Lady Lulu, and their curiosity was at once excited and they questioned Bert about it.

"Mother, the gossips are making a mountain out of a mole-hill, for I simply kept a young lady from being kidnapped, and she happened to be the one who I told you prevented my being shot by knocking up the pistol of the English officer."

Such was his explanation, and a truthful one; but both the mother and sister seemed to feel he was keeping something back, and Bessie said playfully:

"Don't break poor Hettie's heart, brother, by falling in love with some one else."

"And don't fall in love, my son, where your love can never be returned," the mother added.

Bert's face flushed, half with anger, from the flash of his eyes, while he said:

"Bessie, Hettie is a silly little duncie, for I have never given her the slightest reason for believing that I cared for her."

"You risked your life to save her, brother, the day her little skiff was caught on the river in the hurricane and capsized, going when no one else dared go, to her rescue, and she has loved you ever since."

"She has regarded me most kindly, yes, and has tried to show me that she appreciated what I did; but Hettie Lynn can never say that I have made her believe I cared for her more than a friend."

"She does not say so, brother; but she loves you, she is impulsive, headstrong, and does not hide that she cares for you more than any one else."

"I am sorry, sis."

"You thought her very lovely only a few months back, and she is indeed a fine girl," said the mother.

"I think her lovely now, for she is beautiful in face and form, and old Landlord Lynn has taken care to have her become an educated and accomplished woman, but she is not my style."

"What is your style, brother?"

"You are, sis," he said pleasantly, and rising from the breakfast table, he went down to his skiff and started up to town, for he was anxious to sail in a couple of days.

His arm was strong now, so that he could use it a little, and soon it would be as good as of old, so he felt no fear about that.

The wounds on his face had healed, leaving no trace except a slight scar upon one cheek that looked like a dimple, and was rather attractive than otherwise.

His sister went down to the dock to help him set sail on the skiff, and with a wave of his hand, he was off.

"Go and see Hettie, brother, and say good-by, for she is very unhappy."

"All right, sis, if you say so," he called back, and shooting out into the river, he headed up toward the town.

He found a crowd about the Mermaid Bessie, watching her with deep interest, and his crew greeted him pleasantly as he boarded.

The lugger had indeed been metamorphosed, for her bows were razor-shaped, and as sharp, with their iron prow, while in place of her short bowsprit of before, one now ran far out over the waters, ending in a needle-like point.

The breadth between her masts had been so increased as to give her a much longer spread of sail there, while her main-boom rivaled the bowsprit in running out over the water.

The stern had been cut away so that she would not drag water, and altogether the craft had been changed for the better, while, very fleet before, Bert Brandon was assured that he had added three knots an hour to her speed.

Kennebec and Potomac were as proud as peacocks of her, and the two young brothers, known as the Naper boys, and answering respectively to the names of Nick and Van, were delighted with their chance to sail in her.

"Lads, I have a great boat here, and a remarkable crew, inasmuch as I have no seamen, for you, Nick, are my mate, Van is before, Kennebec is pilot and quartermaster, Potomac is cook, and Imp is cabin-boy—so where are the men?" cried Bert Brandon, as he stepped on board.

"The crew'll be on board when wanted, captain," said Nick Naper, saluting politely, and who, with his brother Vanloo, was a splendid specimen of the hardy and daring marine seaman.

"Yes, I am not afraid of not finding them when needed; but with all officers we are like a Virginia regiment; but, Nick, are there any passengers booked?"

"Yes, sir, several; and we've got all the freight we can carry, and I've loaded it so as to put her on her best keel for sailing."

"That is right; but have the guns come on board?" he asked in a whisper, not caring for any of the gaping crowd to hear him.

"All in the secret locker you had made, sir, for Kennebec helped me bring them last night."

"There are ten muskets, five long snare rifles, five pairs of pistols, ten bayonets, and five cutlasses, besides your private weapons, which the gunsmith put in fine condition, and they are hanging in the cabin, for those you won't keep hidden."

"No, and I hope we will not have to show the others; but all will be ready to sail day after tomorrow, at noon?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is nothing more wanted to add to the fitting out of the Mermaid?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Then I will go around and pay my bills for all that has been done," and the young captain went ashore and devoted a couple of hours to "settling up."

This work completed, he wended his way to the inn, which had a large sign hanging before its tap-room door, which read:

"CABIN AND FORECASTLE,

By Landlord Leonard Lynn.

WELCOME ALL!"

It was a comfortable structure of two stories, with a double piazza running the length of it, the stable and yard on the tap-room end, and a kitchen and flower-garden combined upon the parlor end, as the two sides of the inn were designated.

In the rear the yard sloped down to the water's edge.

Mine host Lynn was an Englishman, knew just how to keep a hotel, had married the daughter of the former landlord, and had become more American than the natives, it was said.

He had gotten the inn and a snug sum with his wife, and had not that money, rather had it, in his management of affairs.

His wife had died in giving birth to a little girl, and the father's life was wrapped up in the little child from infancy to womanhood.

As she grew in years her father had sent her to Boston to be educated, and to make a fine lady of her.

The fact is he had spoiled Hettie, for he told her she was beautiful, and reared her to know that she was.

He thwarted her in nothing, and she grew up to be an impulsive girl, fearless, headstrong, and one who would have her own way in all things.

Yet all loved her, for she was good to the poor, and she won friends withal, and had lovers by the score, from the sons of the best people in town to the honest fisher-lads.

Upon no one had she seemed to look with favor, until she accidentally met Bert Brandon.

Soon after he saved her from drowning in the Kennebec, swimming out to her rescue, and bringing her ashore, for there was no boat that would have lived in the wild hurricane that had swept down the river.

From that day he had been her idol, and she did not hesitate to show her preference.

He had called upon her often, had taken her sailing on the river, and enjoyed her society; but he had never committed himself by a confession of love.

As he approached the inn, she was seated upon the upper piazza, engaged in reading.

She saw him coming down the street and arose.

A splendid looking girl she was, with her olive complexion, tinted with perfect health, her tall, willowy form, superb, dangerous black eyes, and handsome features.

"Ho, Captain Bert, I am glad to see you, and to congratulate you upon the finishing of your vessel."

"She's as chipper as a lark, and will be as fleet as a pigeon, or I know nothing of sailing vessels," called out Landlord Lynn, who stood in his tap-room door, smoking a pipe, and advancing to meet the young sailor with a friendly grasp of the hand.

He was an honest-faced old man, with rosy complexion, black eyes and white hair, while his form was corpulent and showed the good living the "Cabin and Forecastle" was noted for.

"Thank you, Landlord Lynn, for your kind words—ah! Miss Hettie, I am glad to see you, and will pay my respects to you in your parlor soon," and looking up Bert Brandon raised his tarpaulin politely.

"The house is stifling hot, so come to the river arbor please, Master Bert, for I am going there," said Hettie.

Bert Brandon bowed and passed on into the inn, while Hettie threw aside her book and went out into the garden, toward a little arbor, hidden away amid a group of dwarf pines.

CHAPTER XX.

LOVE OR HATRED.

AFTER a short chat with Landlord Lynn, who admired the young sailor greatly, and really looked upon him as a prospective son-in-law, Bert Brandon wended his way to the pine grove at the end of the garden, and where Hettie kept her little skiff and sail-boat, for she sailed a boat well, and was the best oarswoman of the town.

Hettie was there, and she greeted the sailor pleasantly, though in a certain constrained manner that was marked.

"You sail day after to-morrow, I believe, Master Bert?" she said, as she motioned to her visitor to sit down beside her on the rustic bench.

"Yes, I hope to, Miss Hettie."

"Is your arm well yet?"

"It does not give me any pain, Hettie, thank you, but is still a trifle awkward and stiff."

"Why do you risk your life by going back to Boston, Bert?"

"The fact is, our skippers seem to be afraid to go, fearing their crews will be seized, and there is a splendid chance to make money now, for freights and passage are very high, while our citizens really need supplies."

"You have never seemed to care for money before."

"I care for it for what it will bring, and if I should be killed, I would like to leave my mother and sister enough to support them."

"The truth is, Hettie, not a coaster has gone out of the Kennebec for weeks, and I am not one to hang back when there should be vessels regularly running."

"You will be seized, perhaps hanged, for resisting the king's officers and taking life."

"I have a right to protect myself, Hettie, and in doing what I did, I acted as any man would or should do who had any pride or pluck."

"And you do not expect to be taken?"

"I hope not, for I shall run in by night, get rid of my freight as quickly as possible, and put to sea again by daylight, flying the coasters' flag, as well as the king's, and in the change the Mermaid has undergone, I do not think she will be recognized as the little lugger that was a fugitive some six weeks ago."

"If you are taken I suppose you will appeal to the Lady Lulu to save you."

"The words were uttered spitefully, and the handsome face was pale now, while the eyes looked like wells of slumbering fire."

"No, Hettie; I am not one to beg for mercy from a man, let alone a woman."

"But she saved your life so nobly, and you saved hers."

"Then we are quits."

"Oh, no; not if you are captured, for you know that she is the niece of the late war secretary of the colonies, and the daughter of a distinguished British noble."

"What do I care for rank, Hettie?"

"It gives her influence; and then she is very beautiful, they say, very rich, only about seventeen, and has a kindly spirit for Americans, especially a Yankee skipper to whom she owes her life."

"You seem to be well-informed, Hettie, regarding the Lady Lulu; far better than I am."

"I have talked with people who were in Boston when you made your desperate run, and I know all, Bert Brandon."

"I know that you acted in that mad way to win the admiration of Lady Lulu."

"Hettie, what has come over you, to say such things?"

"I did not know who it was, even, that I saved that night, until she told me."

"I did not see her again until she appeared on the dock and struck up Lieutenant Nelson's pistol."

The maiden's face was white now, and her eyes blazed.

Her lips quivered and her bosom heaved with emotion, for she madly loved the man before her, and saw, as she believed, him slipping away from her to love another.

"You aim high, Bert Brandon, though you are but a poor Yankee skipper."

"You go out of your walk in life to seek a born lady's love, forgetting what you are," she said, fiercely.

"Hettie, my father was what you call a *born* gentleman, my mother a *born* lady."

"We are poor, have been very poor, but I do not feel we are inferior to others who are rich and titled, as long as we are true and good."

"You seem not well, Hettie, for your face is pale, and you tremble, so return to the inn and seek rest, for you are really ill."

"Would you know what I am ill with, Bert Brandon?"

He did not answer, for he read her secret.

But, without waiting long for a reply, she continued:

"I am love-sick. I love you, Bert, with my whole soul."

"Every fiber of my being thrills with love for you, and I dare confess it to you, though you have never asked me if I loved you."

"You were ever good to me, Bert, and I loved you from my early girlhood, though you seemed not to care for me."

"You saved me from death—you held me in your arms, as you swam ashore with me—you were so good, so kind to me, and my love turned to idolatry."

"You seemed to care for me, come to see me, and I took it that you meant some day to ask me to be your wife."

"Call me unmaidenly if you will, say I am bold, unwomanly and all that, but I will have my say, I will let you know that I love you heart and soul, and beg you not to go back to that proud English beauty, not to desert me."

She spoke in an impassioned way that startled him.

Her words, her manner was such that he did not think her unmaidenly, but pitied her.

What to say he knew not.

He did not love her, that was certain.

The face of Lady Lulu flitted before him with all its beauty and tenderness, and between the two his heart made selection, where his hand might never claim.

"Hettie," he said, in a kindly way:

"I am sorry to have you speak thus, for had I really loved you, in all the time I have known you, I would have told you of that love."

"You are very beautiful, educated, accomplished, and I regard you as I would my own sweet sister."

"I am young, and do not think of marriage, while I have a future before me in which to win fame and fortune."

"Yes, a name and a fortune to offer to Lady Lulu," she hissed.

"My path in life is different from hers, Hettie, for though I feel myself no less well-born, I have a livelihood to make by the toil of my hands, the sweat of my brow, and we have no friendships in common."

"Oh, you will soon seek them, you will win fame, she will get you an appointment in the British Navy, as an officer, and in the war that must come, you will turn your guns upon the hearts of your own people."

"You will ride over all patriotism, home and love to win her, Bert Brandon, for you will be as determined to have her love, as I have been to have yours."

"Hettie, you wrong me, and in your present humor, I will no longer force my presence upon you."

"When next we meet, I hope you will be in a pleasanter mood, and not so harsh toward your old friend Bert."

"When next we meet, Bert Brandon, I will hate you."

"You have scorned my love, and a woman scorned is as deadly a foe as a serpent, and so I warn you," and she shook her little fist in the face of the young sailor, who answered in his gentle way:

"Make no threats that you will be sorry for, Hettie."

"Good-by, and I wish you only happiness."

He held out his hand, but she refused to take it, and wheeling haughtily, he walked away.

He had hardly disappeared before a step in the pines startled her, and a man stood in the entrance to the little arbor opposite to that by which Bert Brandon had entered and departed.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WOMAN SCORNFUL.

THE one who so suddenly appeared in the arbor doorway, coming from among the pines, was a young man of prepossessing appearance, at a first glance, though a study of his countenance would reveal selfishness, dissipation and a lack of moral tone.

He was dressed as a sailor of the better class, his attire was really that of a dandy, and he was about twenty-four years of age.

His mother was a widow, and had been very rich; but she had spent a fortune in getting her son out of scrapes into which his extravagance and dissipation had gotten him.

At last she had purchased a small coaster for him, and thus he had been doing well for half a year past, having reformed it was said.

But he had been overhauled by a British cruiser a few weeks before, and two of his crew had been impressed, and he had narrowly escaped being taken, so that upon returning to port he concluded not to venture another run until he knew there was safety in his doing so.

For years he had wooed pretty Hettie Lynn, and yet, though she was ever friendly toward him, she did not, as the reader has seen, return his affection.

He had seen for himself, or thought he did, that Hettie loved Bert Brandon, and he hated him the more for it, for he already beld ill-will against the young sailor for taking the part of the boy Imp one day, whom he was pounding for sheer devilry.

"Hettie, I saw you coming out to this arbor, and so I came around by the thicket—to find that you were not alone," he said, as he stepped into the little retreat.

"You know who was here then?" she asked, quickly.

"I do."

"You heard what was said?"

"I did."

"You know then that I do not love you?"

"Yes."

"And will not therefore marry you?"

"I did not expect to gain your love, Hettie; but I have wished you to be my wife."

"But, now, knowing what you do, you no longer wish it?" she said, with a sneer.

"You are mistaken."

"You do wish it?"

"Yes."

"That I shall marry you?"

"Yes, Hettie."

"Knowing that I love Bert Brandon as I do—or rather did?"

"Yes."

"Brewster Talbot, you are a fool," she said, fiercely.

"Yes, for loving you."

"And you know that the man I loved does not love me?"

"I am sure of it, though I cannot see how he can help it."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Because he loves another."

"Ah!"

"You wonder who, and I will tell you, for I am willing to make a compact with you, Brewster Talbot."

"You have but to name it, Hettie."

"You hold my secret, that I told a man of my love for him, when he does not love me?"

"I do."

"You know that he scorned me?"

"No, he simply said nothing, in fact, I thought, acted very well."

"You take his part then?"

"Oh, no, I am for you all the time, Hettie."

"Well, I will marry you, Brewster Talbot, upon certain conditions."

"Name them."

"That you get Bert Brandon hanged by the British."

She fairly hissed the words, and the man was startled at the passion and hatred in her face.

"Why, Hettie?" he cried, in alarm.

"I mean just what I say, Brewster Talbot."

"If Bert Brandon is hanged by the British, you will marry me?"

"I will."

"When?"

"The day after he is strung up."

"But how can it be done, Hettie?"

"I leave that to your wit, sir."

"I thought that you loved him?"

"So I did."

"And now—"

"I hate him."

"This is a most remarkably sudden change."

"Yes."

"I cannot understand it."

"I can."

"I wish you would enlighten me."

"He scorned me," she said, with a vehemence that showed the depth of her nature to hate.

"Well, it is worth the prize."

"And you will agree?"

"I certainly shall."

"When will you begin work?"

"When shall I?"

"At once."

"Very well; but he sails day after to-morrow."

"True, and you can sail with him."
 "His crew is made up."
 "Go as a passenger, then."
 The face of the young man flushed, and he seemed nervous.

Seeing it she asked:
 "Will you not do as I ask?"
 "The truth is, Hettie, passage is high now, and I have no ready cash, while my mother would not advance me a cent to leave home with."

"Want of money shall not stand in the way."
 "Wait here for me," and she hastily departed, leaving the young man standing alone.

"Bad as I have been, I have never taken money from a woman before," he said, forgetting the many dollars his poor mother had paid out for his wild ways.

"What does the girl mean?" he continued.
 "A while ago she was begging for Brandon's love, and now she is spending money to get him hanged."

"Why, I half fear her; but then I am madly in love with her, and I'll keep my bargain and hold her to hers."

In a few moments Hettie returned, and throwing herself upon the rustic seat, she said:

"Brewster Talbot, I have brought you here just three hundred dollars."

"Your passage money will take up twenty-five, and you will need some to work on when you arrive in Boston."

"If you squander it in dissipation and gambling, beware of me, for I shall know it, and more, you shall regret it."

"Tell your mother that you are going to see what chances there are for Brandon to run in and out, that you may try with your vessel."

"Now here is the money, and remember, you will be watched."

"You can readily get Bert Brandon arrested and hanged, if not this trip, on his next one, and when you have accomplished your work, come and claim my hand and it is yours."

"I'll do it, Hettie."

"I hate to do this against Brandon, for he is a fine fellow, though I have not forgiven him for the thrashing he gave me the day I was pounding that Satan's imp."

"But I love you, and I would commit murder to win you."

"I do not like taking money from you either, Hettie, but I must, and some day I'll repay it."

"Bah! do as I ask and I am more than repaid."

"If you must have more money to accomplish it, call on me, and I will provide it, so long as I do not think you are squandering it."

"I hope this will be more than enough."

"Now good-by, Hettie, and remember, you are pledged to me."

"It is a fact that I cannot readily forget," she answered, with sarcasm, and then coldly took his outstretched hand.

As he ventured to kiss her, she drew back and said:

"No, sir, you have not bought me yet. When the price is paid, then you own me, not before."

He bowed, turned and walked out of the arbor, disappearing behind a huge bowlder, where he had stood and heard all that had passed between the scorned maiden and Bert Brandon.

For a long while did the cruel girl linger in the arbor, brooding with her bitter thoughts; but at last there came the clanging call for dinner at the inn, and she slowly wended her way to the house.

The next day but one, the Mermaid Bessie, with her new name in gilt letters on the stern, the handsome figure-head of a mermaid upon the bows, and her new rig, cast off from the dock.

Nearly all the town were down to see her off on her venturesome cruise.

Her four state-rooms were all engaged by first-class passengers, and the half-dozen extra bunks forward had been taken, so she carried a full passenger list, while her hold was full with a cargo that would bring big prices in Boston town.

Bert Brandon, or "Capt'g Brandon," as the natives called him after his heroic escape from Boston Harbor, was on deck, wearing a neat-fitting new sailor suit and cap to fit the occasion, and his men were at their posts, while the passengers were gathered aft enjoying the scene, with one exception, who was in her state-room, and whom Nick Napier had told the skipper was a veiled lady, who had come on board after nightfall, he supposed arriving in town on the stage from Augusta.

She had gone at once to her state-room, and said she cared not to be disturbed before sailing.

Brewster Talbot was also on board, and waved farewell to his sad-faced mother who stood upon the dock wishing him godspeed.

As the lugger swung out from the pier and the wind caught her sails, she bent gracefully to the stiff breeze, and dashed away with a speed that brought cheers from the crowd at her fleetness.

Passing "The Nook," Bert Brandon dipped his new flag to his mother and sister, who stood in front of the "Arbor Light-house," waving their kerchiefs and sending many a good wish after him.

Soon the "Light-house" was lost sight of, and

the open sea began to loom up ahead, the run having been made in such remarkable time that Bert Brandon was satisfied that his vessel had surpassed his expectations most fervent.

"Your Mermaid fairly flies, Captain Brandon," said a voice at his elbow.

Turning quickly, he recognized Hettie Lynn.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CRUISE OF THE BOTHER.

"YOUNG ladies, how would you like to join the secretary in a cruise along the coast this pleasant weather, say as far as the Kennebec and back?"

At a glance the speaker saw that his proposition met with success, for the answer of one whom he addressed was:

"It would be delightful!"

The others responded in a like enthusiastic strain:

"I should like it above all things."

It was Captain Delafield who asked the question, and he had driven out to Castle Wyndom for a call, and the secretary being in the city, he had been received by Madge and Lady Lulu.

"The fact is," he went on to say, "Nelson is to take command of the new schooner, built expressly for coast work."

"She is a perfect beauty, and if anything afloat can outfoot her, she will surprise me."

"She is about a hundred tons register, carries a neat battery of three broadside guns, a pivot bow chaser, and a stern gun of equal size as the one forward."

"Her crew will number sixty men, and Nelson is to be her captain, while his officers and men, now on the Vicious are to go with him."

"Her cabin is fitted up grand enough for an admiral, and she is to cruise from Montauk to Portland, while the Vicious is to do duty in the bay."

"Nelson is anxious to try her at once, and I suggested that he ask the secretary, yourselves, and your humble servant to accompany him as guests, for he'll not be gone over a couple of weeks at furthest."

"Now what do you say?"

"I say it would give us pleasure to go, and we'll tease father to-night to say yes," Madge Wyndom answered.

"Uncle Wyndom shall know no peace until he says we can go," Lady Lulu responded.

"Well I'll go in and hunt up the secretary, extend my invitation, tell him your wishes, get his consent, and then send word to Nelson to have all in readiness for his guests, as we must start to-morrow."

"I am really anxious myself to get off on a little cruise, for the harbor is dull, since we fired on that daring young skipper that night, and not a Yankee boat will run in or out, fearing capture, so it will be a relief to get away for awhile," and Captain Delafield returned into town to see the secretary.

He found him at the British headquarters, told him of the invitation extended by Lieutenant Nelson, and its acceptance by the maidens, subject to his approval, and was pleased to have Mr. Wyndom's concurrence.

"Why, of course we will go, for it will be a pleasant trip all round, and I'll take the liberty of contributing to the edibles and wine-list."

So it was arranged, and the next afternoon the Bother, schooner-of-war, set sail, receiving the salutes of the frigate, station-ship and other vessels-of-war, as she passed down the bay.

Before reaching Castle William, the Vicious, under a new commander, saluted and ran alongside for a race, and the fort gave them a salutation as they flew by.

It did not take long for all to see that the new craft was dropping the fleet Vicious, and the commander of the latter vessel crowded on every stitch of canvas that would draw, and then just held his own.

After leaving the castle astern and getting the wind fresher, Neal Nelson ran up his topsails and an extra jib, and the Bother shot right away from the Vicious, amid the cheers of her crew.

"I expected her to be fast, but I did not think she could drop the Vicious like that, and this is the little craft's best point of sailing," said Neal Nelson, justly proud of the new schooner.

"Now, which way, Captain Nelson?" asked the secretary, as they began to ride the waves of the open sea.

"This is a pleasure cruise, Mr. Secretary, but I wished to turn it to profit by running to the Kennebec, with the permission of yourself, Captain Delafield, and my fair lady guests, to see if I could not find that dashing Yankee skipper, Brandon."

Madge and Lulu glanced at each other.

They had watched and waited to hear something of him, and Madge had asked her father's clerk to find out just where on the Kennebec dwelt Bert Brandon.

But not a word had been found out regarding him, and the words of the young British officer just chimed in with their wishes.

"Suit yourself, captain, while I confess I would like to hear more of the young skipper," the secretary replied.

"You know I am wholly at your service, Nelson," responded Captain Delafield.

"And the ladies?" and he bowed to them.

"I think I should like to see the picturesque Kennebec, of which so much has been said," Madge responded, while Lady Lulu added:

"Indeed, I think it would be delightful to run up one of the superb American rivers, which are the talk of all in England who have ever seen them."

"Then to the Kennebec we go, for I have the pardon of young Brandon, for what he did, and would like to give it to him myself, in return for his kindness to me."

"But you know, ladies, though this is a pleasing cruise, I shall be expected to overhaul any Yankee craft I may see, as the threatening troubles impose the duty upon British naval officers to search every vessel belonging to the colonists of King George."

It was the afternoon of the third day after sailing, for the schooner had loitered along the coast, that they sighted the mouth of the Kennebec.

Hardly had the lookout at the maintop reported it, when there shot out into open water a craft speeding along under a fair spread of canvas, and heading for open water.

"Sail ho!" shouted the lookout from aloft.

"Ay, ay, sir, I have my eye on her," answered Lieutenant Nelson, while all the others on deck now turned their gaze upon the stranger.

"She is a lugger, but trim enough for the king's pleasure craft, and has a tremendous sail-carrying capacity, though she has up but mainsail, foresail and jib, and is slipping along at a lively pace," said Neal Nelson, as he took in the different points of the vessel.

"Will you give chase, Nelson, for she looks rakish enough to be one of the small coast pirates?" Captain Delafield said.

"Yes, as we are now headed we can cut her off, for we are bowling along rapidly, and I do think she has a suspicious look, while I see quite a group upon her decks."

"Let her off a couple of points, helmsman, so as to be sure of cutting the fellow out in his intention to get to sea."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the quartermaster, as he obeyed, and the schooner pointed so as to cross the bows of the stranger, at the rate of sailing at which the two seemed then to be going.

To get well up the river before dark, Neal Nelson had crowded considerable sail upon the Bother, which then had up maintopsail, mainsail, foresail and jib.

The wind was blowing fully eight knots, the sea was not rough, and the fourth schooner was bowling along at a pace that won the admiration of her crew.

"I fear you are not going to make it, Nelson, for she will be out of the embrace of the land before you can cross her bows," said Captain Delafield.

"You are right, for she is making far better time than I thought; but even on this course as we are, we would come within easy range and could bring her to with the bow pivot."

"You might; but since that little lugger ran such a gantlet of fire, some time ago, I am not so convinced that a vessel can be brought to easily, if her skipper has the pluck to take the iron as it comes, and stand on, and right here off the coast of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* is the place to find the men of mettle to take all we can give."

"I believe it, and as that fellow is fairly flying, I will order the foretopsail and flying jib set."

This order was promptly obeyed, and the difference in the sailing of the Bother was at once remarked upon.

But the stranger, which had been running dead before the wind, his huge sails spread wing and wing, suddenly changed his course, pointing so as to bring the wind over his stern starboard quarter, while at the same time up went a huge flying jib and topsails.

"By Jove! but the fellow not only does not seem to fear us, but intends giving us a closer look at him, and I'll do all I can to oblige him."

"Keep her bow pointed for the stranger's bow, quartermaster, and, Lieutenant Waters, have the men ready to tend the sheet-ropes as necessary."

"She's a beauty, Nelson," said Captain Delafield, who was examining the stranger through his glass.

"Yes, and she stands up well under her canvas, and in a quiet sea might give us a hot chase."

"There! he wears off, as though satisfied, and runs before the wind once more."

"I'll send a shot after him."

"It's a good chance to try the speed of our vessel, sir," suggested Lieutenant Waters.

"I agree with Lieutenant Waters, Nelson, and I almost believe yonder craft would give you a better chase than did the Vicious," the secretary remarked.

"I am more than willing, I assure you," and Neal Nelson gave orders to at once square away in chase.

* At the time of which I write Maine was included in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

But it very soon became evident that the stranger was gaining on the schooner, and all hands sprung to work to set every stitch of canvas that would draw.

But there was no denying it, the lugger was gaining steadily.

Lieutenant Nelson looked at Captain Delafield in amazement, and that officer returned the look.

"What could it mean?"

"We tried her with the Vicious on this same point of sailing, and we walked away from her," said Rowell Waters, disconsolately.

"She is badly trimmed; doubtless too much down by the head," said Neal Nelson, and he went forward to see.

But she seemed all right.

Still, to make all sure, he had the broadside guns dragged aft, and all the men posted as far aft as was possible.

"She sailed faster before, Nelson," said Captain Delafield.

"You are right, and it is not the fault of her trim."

"No."

"What is it, then?" asked the young officer in a quandary, as he ordered the lieutenant to have the guns replaced.

"Perhaps it is because she does not sail fast enough to gain on the other vessel," Lady Lulu remarked dryly.

"Ah, Lady Lulu! would you hit a man when he's down? For I confess I am down in the mouth to see that craft walk away from us that way, when I thought the schooner fast."

"She is fast, lieutenant; but there is one trouble."

"What is that, Miss Madge?"

"The other vessel is the faster," was the wicked remark.

"I cry mercy! but you are right, though if we had more wind and a rougher sea, I believe we would walk over him."

"That cloud looks like more wind, sir, and as we get out from the land, the sea grows rougher," said Midshipman Clarence Vane.

"You are right, Vane; we are to have wind, and plenty of it, and I notice that where the chase is now, she's got a much heavier sea."

"Try the bow-chaser upon him, anyhow, for he's almost out of range."

In a moment after the heavy gun forward belched forth its iron shot with a deep roar, and the missile was watched with deep interest by every eye.

"Ha! fell short by several cable-lengths."

"He is further off than I suspected."

"Try it again!"

In obedience to the order the gun was a second time fired, and once more with the same result.

"Try again, and with a heavier charge of powder, Mr. Vane," called out Lieutenant Nelson.

"That last was with a full charge, sir."

"All right, try once more, but I fear we cannot reach him."

Again the gun roared, and the third shot fell short, while several voices cried:

"He is rounding to!"

"No, he simply changed his course, knowing he was out of range; and now, Nelson, you have a chance to try what your vessel can do with him, when the wind is abeam."

"Yes, Delafield, but if he did not think his craft good with a beam breeze, he would hardly try it."

"I fear we have picked up a craft that throws her slippers in our face at all points, or the Bother is not so fast as I believed."

"The Bother is fast enough, but yonder craft is a marvel," was the reply of Captain Delafield, who was watching the stranger upon her new point of sailing.

"The Bother is doing splendidly, and goes better with the wind where it is," said Neal Nelson, for the schooner had followed the movement of the chase promptly.

"Yes; but that Yankee gains even more rapidly than he did before the wind."

"You are right, captain."

"Nor is that all."

"Well?"

"He is in rougher water there than we are here."

"True again. He's a marvel!"

"But there comes a squall, and we'll get more breeze than we want with the sail we have set," and Captain Delafield pointed to a thunder-shower sweeping over the sea from landward, and threatening to bring a tiny tornado with it.

But Lieutenant Nelson held on to his canvas until the last moment, and then it was taken in with remarkable speed, and the stanch schooner met the blow in splendid style.

"She's stanch as a church," said the lieutenant, delighted at the behavior of his vessel.

"She is a superb craft, Nelson, and I do not understand the craft we are after."

"He carried canvas as long as I could see him, Captain Delafield, and if he did not get it in he's lost his sticks, or gone down," said Neal Nelson, trying in vain to penetrate the haze upon the waters and discover the stranger.

For nearly an hour the storm continued, but then the clouds swept away seaward, and the sun shone forth once more, though the wind

blew a stiff reefing breeze, and the sea had been lashed into a rather rough state.

"Gone under, sure!" cried Captain Delafield, as he in vain searched for the stranger.

"Right you are! I'll stand off and on, to see if any of the poor wretches can be found."

"Keep a bright lookout aloft there, my man!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"For what are you searching, Lieutenant Nelson?" asked Lady Lulu, just then returning to the deck with Madge and the secretary.

"The stranger, Lady Lulu."

"You are not looking in the right direction."

"See there!"

Neal Nelson came very near uttering an oath, while Captain Delafield exclaimed:

"To windward, by all that's holy!"

A murmur arose from the crew at the surprising sight of beholding the stranger a full mile and a half to windward, carrying mainsail, foresail, and jib, not reefed, and dashing through the rough waters in splendid style.

"He simply put his helm down when the blow struck us, and headed right up into the storm's eye, passed near us in the haze, and there he is," said Lieutenant Nelson.

"Yes, and you can try him now in a run to windward, and pardon me if I say I would shake the reefs out of your fore and mainsail."

"I will, for he carries none, and is walking right away from us."

The reefs were shaken out, but the chase still gained, and, though the bow-chaser was again and again fired, it did not bring the daring skipper to, and, finding he was being led a merry dance for nothing, Lieutenant Nelson gave the order to about ship and to head once more for the Kennebec, where he hoped to anchor by nightfall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOVERY.

It was just dark when the Brother came to anchor under the lee of an island, not intending to attempt an entrance of the river until the next morning.

A fishing-smack had been sighted and brought to, and the poor fisherman, instead of losing his little craft, and being forced to serve the king, before the mast in a cruiser, had been told he would be paid a handsome sum to pilot the schooner up the Kennebec and back.

So he told his two sons, who were his crew, to await his return in a cove of an island, and then he ran the schooner to a safe anchorage for the night.

After breakfast the next morning, when they had breakfasted, having as a treat some fresh fish from the pilot's smack, the Brother got up her anchor and headed up the river.

It was a perfect day, and as they glided along under easy sail, all admired the picturesque and romantic scenery of the Kennebec.

"What craft was it that ran out of the river yesterday afternoon, my man?" asked Neal Nelson, of the rugged-faced pilot, who stood at the schooner's wheel.

"Capt'ing, I dunno; but she was a mighty fast goer."

"She's new to me in these waters."

"Were you very near her?"

"Near 'nough, for I didn't know but as how she might be a pirit."

"Was she armed?"

"Not as I seen, but she could git along, now, c'u'dn't she, capt'ing?"

"Yes, she was very fleet."

"Maybe as how she'd a-tossed your craft her slipper, if you had had a mind to foller her."

"I believe she would readily do so," was the frank response.

"Did you ever hear of a skipper in your river by the name of Brandon?"

"Waal, now, capt'ing, thar was a skipper by that name as runned out o' the Kennebec some years ago; but I have hearn tell as how he were lost at sea."

"He come from up 'bout Bath, I believes, and I don't git up thereabouts very often o' late years, though when I were young I sparked my wife in Bath."

"And you don't know a skipper by that name on the coast now?"

"Bert Brandon is his name," said Lady Lulu, who was standing near.

"Now, see here, capt'ing, and you, miss, I does recomember the name, now the ledly speaks it all."

"Tim Root was down to my cabir—down toward the Sheepscot River is whar I hang out my washin', when I'm ashore, and it's there where the old 'oman lives, along with my darter Sally and little Pharo, and Tim put up in the cove during a day of storm we had, and it's then he told me what he did."

"And what did he tell you, my man?"

"About Capt'ing Bert Brandon."

"What did he say?"

"He said as how news had come up to Bath that a young skipper by that name, had refused to be pressed into the British Navy by a Press-Gang, and had run his vessel out under the fire of the whole fleet and fort, though his lugger was torn up with shot and he had an arm broke."

"Your friend, Tim, told you the truth."

"Now, did he?"

"He did indeed, and it is to find this young man that I have come into the river."

"Capt'ing, you don't know me, nor my natur', so let me tell you right now, my name is Josiah Hall, and I'm a humble, ignorant fisherman, poor and friendless; but you kin string me up ter yer rigging, afore I'll pilot your boat one fathom further to help you catch a young feller as did what you say Capt'ing Brandon done."

The man stepped back from the wheel, pale, calm but resolute, and his words and manner won the admiration of Neal Nelson and his guests alike, while the former said:

"My brave fellow, it is not to harm Captain Brandon that I am seeking him, but to aid him."

"I am the British officer who attempted to seize him, and got worsted by him, and I witnessed his magnificent courage on the day it occurred, and the night he ran out, and I tell you frankly, I never saw a grander sight than his doing what he did."

"This gentleman, Mr. Wyndom, late Colonial Secretary under Governor Hutchinson, of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, aided me to get a pardon from Governor Gage for the young skipper, for what he did do, and I desire to give it to him, along with the offer of an appointment as midshipman on this very vessel."

"Now you know why I wish to find him."

"You look the gentleman, and I believes you, capt'ing, for if you meant to lie to me, you'd dare'n't do it before these two ladies, for there's only truth and goodness in their faces."

The rude compliment was accepted most graciously by Lady Lulu and Madge, while Neal Nelson said:

"My friend, you are right, I would not lie to you, and I despise those of my brother officers who do so to gain an end."

"I have told you the truth, and I am anxious to find the young skipper, as I stated."

"He may accept ther pardon, capt'ing; but he won't take the sarvice under the king."

"Why not?"

"Because he's an American."

"Ah!" and turning to Lady Lulu and Madge, Neal Nelson said:

"This smacks of patriotism, and you find it in nearly every man, woman and child in the colonies."

"It is such men we are going to fight, and it is my opinion that it will be a long, cruel and bloody war before these people are whipped into absolute subjection to King George, if they ever are."

"You are right, Nelson," said Captain Delafield, who had heard the remark.

"Thoroughly right," echoed the secretary, and he added:

"Those in England do not know these people as we know them; but there is an odd little pavilion on that cliff," and he pointed out to the others the object that had caught his eye.

"That's called the Light-house, capt'ing, for there's a skipper lives there as always keeps a lamp lit o' night in the little arbor, jist for the good o' his feller-man, and that's what I calls good human natur'."

"It is indeed, my man; but bring her in close to the shore, for there is some one fishing yonder under the shadow of that bank, and I will hail him," said Neal Nelson.

"There's the house, back under the cliff up in the glen; but I don't know who lives thar, for, as I said, capt'ing, it has been some time since I was up this river to Bath."

"Lieutenant Nelson, that is a woman in that boat, not a man," said Lady Lulu, as the schooner drew nearer, and she landed to him her glass.

"You are right, Lady Lulu, and if I am any judge of a woman's looks at this distance, she is both young and pretty."

"Oh, lend me a glass!" cried Captain Delafield excitedly, and Clarence Vane handed him his, with which he had also been attentively regarding the one in the skiff.

"It's a girl, sure, and what is more, she's just caught a fish, which she does not seem afraid of, either, for she has taken it off of the hook and tossed it into the well in her skiff."

"Nelson, ask your Yankee pilot to go still nearer, please, for I would like to see more of a lady who can bait her own hook, as she is doing, catch a fish and take it off the hook when it is caught."

"I hope you will not find that distance lends enchantment to the view of her face, Captain Delafield," said Madge, laughing.

"I don't believe I shall, for she possesses a very neat figure, I observe, and her sun-bat hides an exceedingly pretty face, or I am greatly mistaken," returned the captain.

The skiff was a graceful one, rising and falling gently upon the waves, and its occupant had thrown out a little anchor and sat there, reading a book, and yet watching the half dozen fishing-lines she had out.

When the schooner drew near, she turned her attention to it most carefully, and kept perfectly still, as though she hoped to remain unnoticed.

But, presently came a hail in Neal Nelson's manly voice:

"Skiff ahoy!"

"Ahoy the schooner!" floated back in musical tones.

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried Captain Delafield.

"Well, she has certainly a sweet voice," said Lady Lulu.

"May I ask you to be good enough to come alongside, lady, as I would like to make some inquiries of you?" and Neal Nelson doffed his cap most politely.

"I will come nearer, sir," was the answer, and the book was cast aside, and the fishing-lines drawn in.

Then, seizing her light oars, she sent the skiff swiftly over the waters.

The wind was light, so that the schooner was not making over four knots; but, out of deference to the fair maid of the skiff, Lieutenant Nelson ordered the pilot to throw the Bother up into the wind.

This was done, and running up under the stern, the fair oarswoman wheeled her skiff around and glanced up into the faces looking down upon her.

"How beautiful!" involuntarily said both Lady Lulu and Madge, while all the gentlemen raised their hats, and Neal Nelson said:

"Pardon, lady, but I seek to find a young skipper of this river, by the name of Bert Brandon."

"Can you tell me aught of him?"

"Bert Brandon is my brother; what would you with him?" was the prompt response.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BOARDING THE BOTHER.

THE reply of Bessie Brandon was a surprise to those on the Bother.

It was so wholly unexpected, and such a coincidence that they should meet her as they did.

The secretary seemed the first to collect himself, after her response, and raising his hat politely, he said:

"Miss Brandon, we are happy in meeting you, and most fortunate, for we were making for the home of your brother, believing him to dwell somewhere upon this river.

"Will you not come on board and meet my daughter and niece?"

The maiden hesitated, while Lieutenant Nelson at once ordered the lee gangway lowered for the young lady to ascend.

Then came her response clear and to the point:

"This is the king's cruiser, and my brother has lately resisted the tyranny of British officers, so I can only believe that you mean him harm."

"Indeed no, Miss Brandon, on the contrary, we are his friends, for I owe to your brother my life, for you have doubtless heard that he saved me from a captivity worse than death?"

"I am Lady Lulu Langdon."

Bessie gazed with deepest admiration into the beautiful face, and replied:

"I heard from others of my brother's rescuing you from pirates, though he did not speak of it until mother asked him about it; but I will trust you, Lady Lulu, as now I feel you cannot be brother Bert's foes."

There was so much childish innocence in her response, that she won their hearts at once, while Madge Wyndom said:

"Lulu, your hero cannot be a boaster, as he never even spoke to his mother and sister upon the subject of his brave rescue of you."

"No, he is as modest as he is brave; but let us meet her at the gangway."

Bessie having determined to go on board the vessel, seized her oars and pulled around to the lee gangway, and Lieutenant Nelson gallantly met her upon the step.

"I am Neal Nelson, Miss Brandon, a lieutenant, and commander of the schooner-of-war Bother, on board of which I bid you welcome," he said, in his pleasant way.

She bowed, accepted his proffered hand, and went over the side, where Lieutenant Nelson presented her, first to Lady Lulu, then Madge, the secretary and Captain Delafield, adding, with a mischievous look at Lieutenant Waters and the middies:

"I will not present my officers, for it is best for their peace of mind that they do not know you, and for the good of the ship, for our Yankee ladies are dangerous acquaintances."

All laughed, though the lieutenant and middies looked a little crestfallen; but in a way that a lady of the king's court might have envied, Bessie said:

"Then, Lieutenant Nelson, in self-defense, as a Yankee girl, you force me to form the acquaintance of your officers myself, to prove that I, for one, am not dangerous," and she walked at once up to Lieutenant Waters and held out her hand in the sweetest way imaginable.

Then came Midshipman Clarence Vane, and Howell Morgan, her act completely turning the laughter upon the nonplused Nelson, who said, as he bowed low:

"Miss Brandon, I indeed recognize you as the sister of Skipper Brandon."

This little episode made the coming of Bessie Brandon into their midst, free from all restraint,

and the secretary at once led her into the handsome cabin of the schooner, the others following.

Had Bessie fitted up for the occasion she could not have looked prettier than she did, for she had on a new gown she had just finished, and which fitted to perfection her beautiful figure.

A sun hat shaded her wealth of hair, and her feet were incased in a pretty pair of new shoes, a present from her brother, which he had brought on his last perilous run out of Boston Harbor.

She had thrown aside a pair of gloves she had on while fishing, displaying her small, shapely hands, devoid of all rings, and not a piece of jewelry was visible about her.

As she sat there in the cabin, she looked the lady, as thoroughly as did Lady Lulu and Madge, though her complexion was brown as a nut.

Then, too, her manners were as composed as though she had been a society miss all her life, for her mother and father had taught her well.

In a few words, at the request of Lieutenant Nelson, Secretary Wyndom told her all that had happened, and that the young commander of the Bother, though beginning his acquaintance in a hostile manner with her brother, had become his firm friend, secured for him a pardon for his act of resistance, and the position of midshipman on board the schooner.

"It is the first step, Miss Brandon, understand me, and, with your brother's nautical knowledge, skill and daring, he will mount rapidly up the quarter-deck ladder," said Neal Nelson.

"I am sure my brother will feel honored by your kindness and friendly regard, Lieutenant Nelson, and I am happy in knowing that his life is no longer in danger from his act."

"But you must get his reply as to what he will do in the matter, and at present he is away, having sailed yesterday afternoon for Boston."

Glances of surprise went around, while Captain Delafield asked:

"Did he sail in his lugger in which he ran that desperate gantlet, may I inquire, Miss Brandon?"

Bessie's face flushed, and they saw it.

She did not wish to tell, and yet, if they were friends, what was the harm she thought.

So she answered:

"The Mermaid was pretty roughly used in her last run, and so my brother had her wholly refitted, lengthened forward with a new bow, and larger spars put on her from bowsprit to topmasts, so you would not know her as the same."

"He thought it would increase her speed, though before she was the fleetest craft he had ever seen of her tonnage."

"He planned nicely in his alterations, Miss Brandon, I am compelled to admit, for she walked away from my schooner, before the wind, with the breeze abeam, and ran to windward of me in a style that was most gratifying—to him," and Lieutenant Nelson laughed.

"I thought, when she sped by here that she had been greatly improved; but you saw her then?"

"Yes, we saw her, and that was all, for we could neither overhaul her or bring her to."

"I thought I heard firing last evening; but there were several lady passengers on board, and I hope you did not hit her?" and Bessie seemed most anxious.

"No, indeed, Miss Brandon, and I regret firing upon her, as I now know she was your brother's vessel, while had I suspected the presence of ladies on board, I would never have burned powder in an attempt to bring her to."

"But I must say your brother is a most daring man, to deliberately run into Boston Harbor again."

"We are poor, Lieutenant Nelson, and there are no other skippers who dare leave the Kennebec, when the king's laws are so severe upon American seamen, and my brother is anxious to make a living?"

"Freight and passage is high, and outside of this fact, our river people need supplies sadly, and this alone would tempt my brother to run another gantlet of fire."

"Well said, young lady, and I honor him the more for it," said the secretary, while Lady Lulu asked:

"But is your brother not still a sufferer with his wounds, received that awful night?"

"His arm was broken, Lady Lulu, and he received some cuts in the face; but he ran into Salem and had a surgeon dress his injuries, and then his faithful negro, Potomac, whom he had feared he had lost, joined him, and so he had little difficulty bringing the Mermaid back."

"But his arm is not yet well, surely?"

"Yes, it troubles him but very little now, and will soon be as sound as ever."

"And that cunning ducky joined him in Salem?" asked Lieutenant Nelson, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes, sir, he pitched overboard, and neither Bert or Kennebec, the Indian, saw him."

"Missing him, my brother was about to put back to search for him, when your boat was seen to pick him up, so brother held on his way and escaped, while Potomac told us how cleverly he got away, and he at once set out on foot for

Salem, having heard his master say he would have to run in there to have his arm set."

"Miss Brandon, your brother is a most remarkable man, and I have the warmest regard for him, so I will place in your hands this pardon from Governor Gage, and the official order from Admiral Shuldham for him to report to me for duty."

"I should prefer, sir, that you would give them into my mother's hands, and explain all to her."

"Certainly, Miss Brandon, if you wish it, and I'll offer myself as your escort home."

"I will be glad to have you all accompany me, if you care to land, though I assure you our home is a most humble one, a mere cabin."

The invitation was accepted with pleasure by the maidens, the secretary and Captain Delafield, and half an hour after Bessie led the way in her skiff into the cove, the cutter following in her wake, and all delighted at the opportunity of viewing the home of the daring young skipper.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BRANDONS AT HOME.

MRS. BRANDON had caught sight of the cruiser, and at once sought the lookout point by the Arbor Light-house.

From there she had seen Bessie go on board the Bother, and had anxiously awaited his return.

Then she had appeared coming ashore, leading the cutter, in which she saw ladies, with officers in full uniform, and a gentleman in civilian's dress.

What it meant she could not conjecture; but certainly they were not hostile, apparently.

She saw the schooner glide slowly in under the cliff to an anchorage, as the wind was dying out, and then she returned to the cabin to prepare to greet the visitors.

Her preparations were soon made, for her home was always most tidy.

As the party reached the top of the stairs, Mrs. Brandon met them there, dignified, elegant—a lady, as all could see at a glance.

In a pleasant way Bessie introduced them to her mother, who at once led the way to her little cabin home, still wondering at their coming, until the secretary advanced in his courtly way, and in a few words told her just what had brought them.

Mrs. Brandon seemed touched with the words of praise bestowed upon her noble son by those who she believed had been his foes, and the tears came into her eyes when Lady Lulu came forward and in her sweet way told of her being kidnapped by a pirate, but just who she never had told any one excepting Madge, and her rescue from drowning, when he threw her into the sea.

"I owe him my life, and I can understand his noble nature, which has accomplished so much, now that I have the pleasure of knowing his mother and sister," she added.

Bessie then got out some rare old decanters and glasses, relics of affluence when Mrs. Brandon had been first married, and from a closet some wine was taken which was pronounced by the secretary and Captain Delafield as fine as any they had ever drank.

The day before Bessie had made some cakes, for her brother to carry with him, and one of these the visitors pronounced delicious, while Captain Delafield said gallantly:

"It must be a great thing, Miss Brandon, to be a lady and a cook, such as you are combined."

"Both accomplishments, if so I may call them, I owe to my good mother," was the response of the maiden.

After admiring the neat, but humble home, having a glance into Bert's "cabin," as he called his room, and a stroll about the grounds, the party walked toward the Light-house, Lieutenant Nelson remarking as they walked away:

"I saw a very fine pair of rapiers, Miss Brandon, in your brother's room, and they remind me to ask you when he learned to use them?"

"My father was his teacher, and they are his weapons."

"If I had thought, I would like to have crossed blades with you," she said, mischievously.

"Ah! do you fence?" he asked, with surprise.

"It is a woman's right, is it not, Lieutenant Nelson?"

"Indeed, yes; but you amaze me, and I would like the honor of crossing a blade with you, to say that I have met one lady who can hold one up."

"Take mine, please, and Captain Delafield, let me have your sword, for it matches mine fairly."

All stopped and looked on, while Madge said with a pretty smile:

"Remember, you are the challenger."

The lieutenant bowed, the maiden took her stand, greatly to the interest of the others, while Mrs. Brandon said chidingly:

"I fear, Bessie, our guests will think you unmaidenly."

"By no means, Mrs. Brandon! I only wish that I possessed such accomplishment," cried Lady Lulu, and Madge said:

"And so do I; how we would hold our own then in an argument against mankind."

"A woman's tongue is a more dangerous weapon than any I ever saw a man use, young ladies," the secretary remarked, while Captain Delafield rejoined:

"I assure you, Miss Brandon, I am anxious to see a lady fence, and a weapon a man holds in honor, should not, I think, be out of place in a lady's hand."

"On guard then, sir," said Madge, sharply, and the blades crossed with a clash.

If Lieutenant Nelson had felt that it was to be but a little by-play upon his part, he not only saw at once that he was mistaken, as did also the secretary, and Captain Delafield realized that fact.

With a skill and strength that were surprising, Bessie handled the weapon, throwing her adversary wholly upon the defensive.

Quick, strong and skillful were her movements, until, as Neal Nelson was anxious not to harm her by a miss stroke, he was forced to give ground.

"I cry hold!" he called out, thoroughly convinced, that, superb swordsman that he was, he would, if in earnest combat, find it no light matter to disarm the maiden.

"Miss Brandon you are a prodigy—an artist of considerable merit, a cook, an oarswoman, a sailoress, for your good mother says you sail a boat well, a good shot, as we know by the trophies of the chase we have seen of yours, and last and greatest of all for a lady, a splendid swordsman."

"I better understand, now that I know you, how it was your brother accomplished all that he did," and Captain Delafield bowed gallantly, while Mrs. Brandon said:

"My husband trained both of my children alike, as far as outdoor sports were concerned, and I must say that Bessie was as devoted a pupil as was her brother."

They had now reached the Light-house Arbor, where an exclamation of surprise burst from Bessie's lips.

And no wonder, for a score of small boats were upon the river crowded with men, and one was approaching the anchored schooner, a white flag in her bows.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DANGER THREATENED.

THERE was something startling in the sight of so many boats, full of armed men, not only to the visitors, but to Bessie and her mother.

What it meant no one seemed to know, and Lieutenant Nelson said quickly:

"I will go at once on board, for this demonstration threatens the schooner."

"Mr. Wyndom, I leave the ladies in your care and that of Captain Delafield."

"I will go with you, sir," cried Bessie.

"You, Miss Brandon?"

"You, my child?"

"Yes, for if those men mean harm to the vessel, I can perhaps prevent it, for surely there is some mistake, as this demonstration looks most hostile."

"Go, my child, for our people know you, and may be influenced by you," said Mrs. Brandon, anxiously.

So Bessie hastened away with the young commander, while the others stood upon the point of the cliff, where was the arbor, gazing upon the scene.

It was a strange scene, too, for the schooner lay at anchor outside of the cove, and close in under a lofty cliff.

Not a breath of air stirred the waters, so that she was helpless.

The boats had come down the river, a score in number, and with from three to a dozen persons in each boat, and the little fleet had assembled behind the point that formed the upper bank of the cove, directly beneath where the party on the cliff stood.

The men were armed with muskets, rifles and large pistols, and were a quiet, orderly set, watching with interest the boat they had sent to the schooner with a flag of truce in the bow.

In that boat were five persons, four of whom were oarsmen.

Looking up the river Mrs. Brandon saw half a dozen boats tied against the bank, and containing no occupants, and she pointed them out to Captain Delafield, who asked quickly:

"Can they make a flank movement from there, madam, and reach the cliff above the schooner?"

"Yes, sir, for the highway runs along the ridge, a couple of hundred yards from the river, and they have doubtless taken that way to reach the cliff."

"Do you recognize any of them, madam?"

"They are the people of the town, sir, most of them from the river fleet that is lying there idle."

"And can you conjecture their errand?"

"They have suffered much, sir, from the tyranny—pardon me if I use the word—of British officers; their vessels are idle, the people are poor, provisions are scarce and high, and I would not be surprised if they thought they could retaliate upon a king's vessel and thus get terms; but this is only conjecture, Captain Delafield."

"Frankly, they have the schooner at a disadvantage, for, becalmed as she is, men on that cliff could pick off every man of her crew, and no harm could reach them, while their allies in the boats could board."

"I am anxious to know what the result will be."

"See, Nelson and your daughter are going out of the cove, and will soon reach the schooner, while I see that Lieutenant Waters has ordered the boat with the white flag to keep off."

"Hark! we can hear what is said," said Mrs. Brandon.

"I wish to board and talk with you, captain," said the man in the stern of the boat.

"The captain is coming on board now, so you can consult with him; but in the mean while keep off," replied Rowell Waters.

"Waters has got the men under arms," said the secretary.

"Yes; but the cutter is heading directly for the schooner, and ignoring the boat, you see," Captain Delafield remarked.

A moment after the cutter ran alongside the schooner, and Neal Nelson and Bessie boarded, the oarsmen remaining in their boat.

"Well, Waters, what is all this about?"

"I know nothing more than you do, Lieutenant Nelson; but that boat with a white flag there wishes to come on board."

"Let it do so."

"I know the man, sir, who is in the stern, and he is treacherous as a snake."

"He is skipper of a sloop, and has considerable influence among the people, but is the foe of my brother and myself, from reasons I care not to make known," said Bessie, quietly.

The boat having been signaled to come alongside, the man referred to mounted the deck, and came aft.

He was a young man, with a sinister, cruel face, marked by dissipation and recklessness, and looked one to lead men in any bad cause.

He saluted politely, raised his hat to Bessie, and without giving Neal Nelson time to ask his business, said:

"Are you the captain of this king's schooner, sir?"

"I am the lieutenant-commander, sir, and I desire to know what this hostile demonstration on your part means?"

"I can soon tell you, sir, and you will like it better when you know."

"Word came up to town by a fishing-smack last night that a king's cruiser lay at anchor below, and intended coming up the river to seize and hang Bert Brandon, because he had the pluck to resist a Press-Gang."

"So the men got together and decided that it should not be done, and we came down the river to prevent it, and yonder are one hundred good men, while on the cliffs above are half a hundred of our best riflemen, and a party have gone to the dismantled fort below, to man half a dozen good guns that are there to prevent your putting to sea."

The situation looked serious, but Neal Nelson was not one to show dread, and he replied coolly:

"And what is your demand, sir?"

"The surrender of your vessel."

"My good fellow, the man who hauls down the flag over a deck I command has got to fight for it."

"Then you refuse?"

"Most certainly; so make your attack just when you please."

"Ray Deming, one moment?" and Bessie stepped forward.

"Well, Miss Brandon?" he said with a sneer.

"You are making a vast mistake, in what you are doing, for you are bringing upon the heads of innocent people suffering for your acts."

"You know that my brother is not here, that he put to sea yesterday, and—"

"Yet you are held as a hostage for him?" said the young man nervously.

"It is not true, and you but assume an excuse to carry out your own evil ends."

"This gentleman is my brother's friend, he gained a pardon for him, for his resistance of authority, and came here to give it to him, and there are ladies and gentlemen, his friends, now at my mother's home as guests, so you see there is not the slightest cause for you to precipitate trouble by making an unwarrantable attack upon this vessel."

"You speak well and wisely, Miss Brandon, and I hope this headstrong young person will see the truth of your words, and not do so foolish a thing as to attack us," said Neal Nelson.

"My dear sir, look up yonder and see that my men can kill every man on your deck, and you not be able to fire a shot in return, while our boarders can capture you," and Ray Deming pointed to the cliff, where were visible a number of men, all carrying arms, and gazing down upon the vessel.

"No doubt you could do as you say; I grant it; but within a week the British fleet would sweep into your river, lay waste your towns, burn your houses, slay your people, and take ample revenge, so do not believe that you would have it all your own way, though you destroyed us now."

"Do you hear, Ray Deming, what you

threaten to bring upon this fair land?" asked Bessie.

"I hear, Bess Brandon, but I do not heed."

"Then I shall let others hear, for you shall not have things your own way," was the indignant reply.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Ray Deming.

"I shall show you."

"Lieutenant Nelson, remain by your ship, but give me those papers you brought for my brother, please."

He silently obeyed.

"May I have the loan of your cutter, sir?"

"Certainly, Miss Brandon," and stepping to the side he called out:

"Coxswain, obey Miss Brandon's orders."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"A flag of truce now, please."

Clarence Vane got her one,

"What are you going to do, Bess Brandon?" again asked Ray Deming, angrily.

"Try my power against yours," was the haughty reply.

"The men will not heed you."

She paid no attention to his words, but went over the side into the boat, while Neal Nelson said sternly to the young conspirator:

"If you wish to leave in peace, sir, do so now."

"I'll go, but I'll haul down your flag, proud Englishman, within the hour."

"If you do not go at once, some other will have that duty to perform, for you will not be able to," was the significant rejoinder, and Ray Deming took the hint, and springing into his boat said, quickly:

"Give way, lads, and reach the fleet before yonder cutter, for that girl has a glib tongue."

Bessie saw the boat coming on rapidly, and she said, quickly:

"Pull with a will, men, for that boat must not pass us."

Then it became a race between the boat and the cutter, and a close one it was, watched with deep interest by the crowd to which they were going, the men on the cliff, the schooner's crew, and the party at the arbor lookout.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BESSIE'S ARGUMENT.

"MEN, I wish to speak with you!" cried Bessie, as she took the tiller from the coxswain, ran the cutter just where she wished it, and gave an order to the crew to cease rowing.

At the same moment up dashed the other boat, while Ray Deming called out:

"Mates, there is treachery here, so don't let that girl deceive you."

There were fully a hundred men before them, bold, honest fellows, though many of them were rough and ignorant.

All knew Bessie Brandon, and respected her, her mother and her brother.

So a number of voices called out:

"Give Miss Bess the first chance to spin her yarn."

"Thank you, gentlemen," and Bessie arose in the stern of the cutter and steadied herself with an oar.

"I say don't let her gull you," angrily called out Ray Deming.

"Hold your tongue, Ray, and let the girl talk," said an old white haired skipper, and turning to Bessie he continued:

"Now, marm, what has yer ter say ter us?"

"I thank you, sir, and I will not detain you long; but I wish to appeal to your good sense, and not to your patriotism or passion, as Ray Deming has done."

"The vessel you see there is King George's schooner-of-war Bother, on her trial cruise, and she has brought as a pleasure-party, the Honorable Rupert Wyndom, late secretary to Governor Hutchinson, his daughter, his niece, Lady Lulu Langdon, and Captain Delafield, of the British Navy."

"You see them standing on Light-house Cliff with my mother."

"The object of the Bother coming into the Kennebec was to bring to my brother a pardon from Governor Gage, for his bold act in resisting the king's officers, and running out of the harbor as he did."

"His pluck won the admiration of the British officers, while his act, in saving the life of Lady Lulu as he did, gained him a pardon."

"These papers I have here to show you, and this is the only object in the schooner visiting the Kennebec, for she departs again this afternoon."

"Your leader there, Ray Deming, would bring you into trouble, for, before my face, he told the commander of the schooner that he had come to hang my brother, and held me as a hostage."

"It is untrue, for you know my brother has gone to Boston, and I am free, as you see, and I went on board the Bother, where I recognized your leader, fearing his rashness might bring trouble upon you all."

"There is trouble brewing, we all know, and it may come very soon; but do not you bring upon yourselves the thought that you start the deadly conflict by a cruel and unjust act."

"You can capture the schooner, granted, for

she is becalmed, and your riflemen hold her at their mercy; but mark the result—within a week not a village or home will be left standing on this river, not a keel will be left unburned, and, unprepared for the worst, your wives and children will be the greatest sufferers.

"That man, Ray Deming, has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, so do not let him lead you against your good sense, for he is not worthy of your trust or your respect.

"My friends, I have pleaded with you—I have warned you."

Every word uttered, in the clear, musical voice of Bessie Brandon, had been heard by those upon the point of lookout above.

On the distant cliff the riflemen had stood, regarding the strange scene with deepest interest.

On the schooner a still deeper interest was felt, and every eye was upon the maiden.

In the fleet of boats the men sat in deathlike silence, regarding her with respectful attention, while Ray Deming was uneasy, pulled the ends of his long mustache, and bit his lips viciously.

When she had ceased speaking she glanced at the young ringleader, who arose in his boat and called out:

"Mates, that is all silly talk, and amounts to nothing."

"The girl simply wishes to save her British friends, and we must not lose the chance of seizing that vessel, for it is ours."

"Seize it then, and woe be unto those who aid you in your wicked work, Ray Deming, for they will be sufferers, not you," came in the ringing voice of Bessie Brandon, and it came in the nick of time, for the tide was turning with the leader.

"No! no! no!"

A perfect roar of voices arose in the negative, followed by the words:

"The girl is right!"

"Bravo, Bessie!"

"You've won, Miss Bess."

"She tells the truth, mates!"

"Don't throw treachery in her face, Deming, with the brother she has."

"She's true as steel!"

Then Bessie arose, and silence fell upon all.

"My friends, I thank you, and may God bless you, for you have done right."

"Now I beg of you to call off your riflemen, and to watch Ray Deming, or he may urge some foolhardy ones among you to fire on the schooner."

"I thank you, and bid you good-by."

She kissed her hand to the crowd, and dropped down in her seat, while a perfect storm of cheers followed her as she was rowed away by the strong arms of the British tars.

"Beg pardon, my lady, but no man could have done what you did, for that was an ugly crowd to handle, and their leader was wicked in his hatred of us," said the coxswain, and, as he saluted, each oarsman raised his hand quickly to his cap in most respectful salutation.

"I feared for the result, coxswain, for Ray Deming hates me as he does Englishmen; but there were many there who knew me, and all know my brother."

"Your brother, my lady, did the pluckiest act, and the most seaman-like one, I ever saw done, when he ran out of the harbor that night."

"I was in the barge he ran down, and he showed his heart was right by cutting loose his yawl for us."

"He is a splendid man, my lady, is your brother," and again came the respectful salute from the oarsmen, as though to emphasize their views as being the same as expressed by the coxswain.

"They are signaling the men from the cliff so they will draw off," and Bessie smiled triumphantly, as she saw the riflemen disappear from the edge of the cliff.

A moment more and the boat touched the schooner, and Neal Nelson stood at the gangway to receive the maiden, but she said, quickly:

"I will not come on board, for all is arranged, and we will go ashore now."

"Miss Brandon, we owe much to you, more than I can express in words, and but for the fact that those men might misunderstand it, the crew would have given you a welcome that would have made these old rocks ring again."

"As it is, I could hardly restrain them, while Midshipman Vane is offended because I did not give you the salute of a queen as you came alongside."

"But joking aside, we all, down to the powder-monkeys, realize that you saved our lives and our ships, for that man meant no mercy to Englishmen, and his men were rife for following his lead."

"You exaggerate the situation, Lieutenant Nelson, I assure you, for I only made them a little speech," said Bessie, blushing crimson at the eyes turned upon her and the praise.

"Beggin' yer pardon, my lady, and the cap'n's, for speakin' my mind; but it was the biggest speech I ever heard, and my mates says so, too," said the coxswain.

Neal Nelson laughed and said:

"You see that the majority is against you, Miss Brandon; but I am ready now, if you deem it safe to leave my ship."

"It is, sir, perfectly safe; but let me say that I am glad that your pilot, whom I noticed to be one of our river-men, has kept out of sight, and he had best continue to do so, while I will pilot you down the river to your anchorage of last night, for watchful eyes may be on the vessel, and, if recognized, there are men who would give him trouble."

"He realized that, and asked permission of Waters to go below when he saw the boats coming; but you may get into trouble, I fear, and—"

"Oh, no! they will not harm me, sir."

"Then I shall be most happy to have so fair a pilot, while I promise you the king shall hear what you have this day done."

"I pray you, Lieutenant Nelson, do not say more upon the subject," and soon after the boat reached the little dock, where the secretary and Captain Delafield joined them.

"Miss Brandon, every word that you uttered we heard, and I must say that you are a diplomat of wondrous powers, and you can hug to your heart the sweet assurance that King George owes to you the possession of his vessel and the lives of his crew," and the secretary bent low, with uncovered head, and kissed the little hand he held.

"Permit me, Miss Brandon, to say that Secretary Wyndom has but uttered my sentiments, and add that I feel it a great honor to know you," and Captain Delafield also bowed low.

With tears in her beautiful eyes Bessie heard these flattering words, and her heart was too full to speak, as she led the way up to the cabin.

There both Lady Lulu and Madge advanced and kissed her, in a manner that expressed more than words, while her mother said:

"My brave little Bess, I felt that you would triumph over that wicked Ray Deming."

Then the health of the fair girl was drank, and as Neal Nelson reported that a breeze was springing up when they entered the cove, farewells were said to Miss Brandon, and Bessie accompanied the party on board the schooner to act as pilot out to sea, saying gayly to her mother:

"I'll take my surf-skiff, mother, and soon run back again, for the wind is fair."

Half an hour after the Bother left her anchor, and all on deck gazed admiringly at Bessie, as she stood in graceful attitude at the wheel, declining the assistance of a helmsman, as the pretty craft bent gracefully to the breeze upon her run away from the scene where her fate had been so nearly sealed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SHOT FROM AN AMBUSH.

WITHOUT a mistake, issuing her orders quietly to Lieutenant Nelson, who gave them to the crew, Bessie Brandon ran the vessel down the Kennebec past the fort, which held no garrison then, stretched away beyond Cape Small Point with its sandy beach, and anchored under the lee of Sequin Island, where the fishing-smack awaited the pilot.

Here the maiden bade farewell to her new-found friends, and got into her skiff for the homeward run of several leagues.

"It will be night before you get back," said Lady Lulu, anxiously.

"Oh! I do not mind that, for I have often been on the river at night, in storms, too."

"I shall get home in safety, thank you," was the plucky reply.

"Remember, Miss Brandon, you have promised to have your brother bring you to visit us!" called out the secretary.

"Yes, and I'll give you a ball on board my ship!" cried Captain Delafield.

"And another on the Bother!" said Neal Nelson.

"And the admiral shall give one in your honor on the frigate!" shouted the secretary, as the little skiff went skimming away over the waters.

Having paid the fisherman well for his services, Neal Nelson headed the schooner southward, it being his desire to reach Boston as soon as possible, and save Bert Brandon from any other trouble he might have gotten into by running into the harbor.

So the Bother sailed away, while the little skiff, under her tiny sprit-sail, went bounding over the billows back into the mouth of the Kennebec.

As she sailed up the river, before coming to the fort, a skiff suddenly shot out of the dark shadows ashore and gave chase.

She did not see the skiff until it was very near her, and then she started, trimmed her sail, and did all she could to make her little craft speed faster.

Just then the wind was cut off in a measure, by the Sugar-Loaf Hills, and the oarsman was gaining upon the maiden.

Her face blanched slightly as, when he turned his head, she recognized Ray Deming, the leader of the crowd to attack the Bother.

Seeing that he was gaining rapidly, Bessie turned and seized her light oars, while she still kept her sail up and steered with her foot.

By this means she quickened her pace a little,

though not enough to prevent her pursuer from gaining.

"Oh, that I had my light skiff," she said to herself, for she had taken a life skiff, belonging to her brother, and which, though a good stiff sailer, was not easy to row as her own.

The one that Ray Deming came on in, was a very light boat, and he was a powerful oarsman, so held the advantage.

Seeing that he would overtake her she called out:

"Ray Deming, how dare you pursue me, thus?"

He half turned, though he kept up his strong stroke, and replied:

"My beautiful Bess, you spurned my love, you thwarted me to-day when I could have enriched myself, and I intend to take sweet revenge by forcing you to marry me, for I shall take you far away from the Kennebec, as I have a mind to become a rover."

His words startled her, and then the regret arose in her heart that she had not brought some weapon with her.

But she said boldly, though unarmed:

"If you do not cease rowing, you will force me to use my rifle."

He laughed, and replied:

"I watched you from the cliff, sweet Bess, and saw that you were so taken up with your English friends, that you brought neither rifle or pistol."

"If you have a weapon, as you would have me believe, now is your time to use it."

He was now but a couple of lengths away, and she felt would be alongside in a moment more, so she shipped her oars, seized one, and was rising to defend herself, as best she could, when there came a sharp report, a cry, and the pursuer dropped his oars and sunk down in his boat.

Bessie was amazed, for from whence had come the shot?

She saw a white puff of smoke rising from one of the embrasures in the fort, but beheld no form.

She hallooed, but no answer was returned.

It was a shot fired from an ambush, and yet he who fired it would not show himself.

It had done good service for her, however, as it had checked her pursuer.

The tide was sweeping the two boats on up the river, and, hearing a groan from Ray Deming, the brave girl at once seized her tiller and ran to see if he were badly wounded.

Sue found him lying across the seat he had been sitting on while rowing, and there was a red stain upon the right side of his blue sailor jacket.

He was conscious, but unable to move, and said fiercely:

"You have killed me."

"I did not fire that shot, Ray Deming."

"Do not add falsehood to treachery, Bessie Brandon."

"I did not fire upon you—it came from the old fort, and who fired it God only knows."

"See! the wound is in your right side, so how could I, from where I was, shoot you, even had I been armed?"

"Great God! you are right; but don't let me die, Bessie, for the love of Heaven!"

"I am not fit to die," he whispered.

"Ray Deming, you have hated me because I did not love you, and you meant to be avenged upon me; but I will do all I can for you now."

"Come! let me help you into the stern of your boat, and I will take your oars and row you up to the town, for I can go quicker than if I tow your boat and sail."

"For Heaven's sake make haste, for I fear I am dying."

"I will do all I can, Ray," she said cheerily, and she quickly aided him to the seat in the stern, arranging him in as comfortable a position as possible, and then seizing the oars bent to her work.

It was now dark, and the situation was an appalling one to her, for the wounded man groaned continually, and when his groans ceased for a moment, she thought he was dead.

But she kept up her strong and steady stroke over the waters, aided by the tide, and went swiftly along.

She had left her skiff adrift, intending to pick it up as it went by the town, for, being white, she could see it upon the dark waters.

As she drew near The Nook, she rested on her oars, and placing a horn to her lips blew a winding blast.

It was a signal used by both her brother and herself, to let their mother know of their coming.

Again she blew it, while the tide swept her on.

"I wish you would stop that infernal horn-blowing, Bessie, for it reminds me of Gabriel's trumpet sounding for judgment," whined the man.

"I must let my mother know I am going up to the town, for she will be most anxious about me."

"Hark! she answers," and across the waters came the ding-dong of a small bell which Bert Brandon had swung in the Arbor Light-house.

Then again did Bessie wind her horn, the sound rising and falling musically upon the

waters, and awakening many an echo along the rocky shores.

"There, mother had forgotten the light, as I always attend to it now."

"It works like a beacon of light to me, and hope," said Ray Deming.

"I hope you will not die, for you are so wicked I could wish you had time to repent," the maiden said, and then, as she was opposite to the entrance to the cove, she hailed:

"The Nook ahoy!"

"Yes, Bessie," came back in her mother's voice.

"Mother, it is urgent that I go on at once to Bath, but I will soon come back, so don't be alarmed."

"Why do you go?" came indistinctly over the waters.

"Good-night, mother, I'll soon be back," came the answer, for Bessie evaded the direct question, fearing to alarm her mother.

On up to the town she rowed, landing at a wharf near the inn, to which she ran for assistance.

When men came to the boat to carry the wounded man to his home, she said simply, so that he might hear her:

"Some one fired at Ray Deming from the river-bank, and as I saw him fall back in his boat, I went to his aid."

"Good-night, Mr. Deming, and I hope you will not find yourself severely wounded."

Then she sprung into the skiff, rowed out and caught her own boat, as it was being carried up the river by the tide.

Taking Deming's boat back to the dock, where he kept it, she started homeward and found her mother most anxiously awaiting her.

To her she told her story, adding:

"Mother, I did not say that Ray Deming was pursuing me, simply that he was shot by some one in ambush on the river."

"So let it be thought for the present; but who that mysterious person can be who fired the shot, I cannot tell."

"Nor can I imagine, my child; but come, it is late, and this has been a long day for you, so eat a good supper and we will seek rest, as you look pale and tired!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MERMAID'S ESCAPE.

BERT BRANDON was not one to be thrown off his guard, but he certainly was nonplused, when he found that he had as a passenger Hettie Lynn, the innkeeper's pretty daughter.

"I did not anticipate the pleasure of your company, as a passenger, Hettie," he said pleasantly, though he felt annoyed that she had come, and wondered what her reason was for so doing.

"No, it is doubtless an unpleasant surprise to you, Captain Brandon, for I suppose I must give you your title, now that you command so fine a craft, and carry five in crew."

"No, Hettie, I am plain Bert Brandon, and Skipper Bert is as high as I have soared yet."

"Yet! then you expect to rise higher?"

"I have ambition to get above what I now am, certainly."

"Through the aid of Lady Lulu."

She spoke with a sneer in her voice and face, and he saw that she was in an ugly humor, so he said firmly:

"Hettie, the run to Boston will be a pleasant one, if you are not inclined to make it unpleasant for all on board."

"Your words do not hurt me, and, as there are some nice people on board, all will go well, if you will only make up your mind not to be disagreeable."

"Had I known that it was for you that the state-room had been engaged, I would not have allowed it, fearing, after your words to me, you meant to annoy me."

"I do, and I shall," was the fierce rejoinder.

She saw that she had made a mistake, for Bert Brandon was not one to be bullied by even a pretty woman.

His eyes flashed, but perfectly calm he said:

"Hettie, I hoped to remain your friend, but as you seem determined not to have it so, I now tell you frankly, if you attempt any scene on my vessel, I shall put back to Bath and land you."

"And more, after we leave the river, if you attempt to carry out your threat, I shall run into Portland, or Portsmouth, and land you, so that you may take the stage back home."

"I have a valuable cargo under my charge, and passengers under my care, while I expect to have to run a gantlet through Massachusetts Bay to get to my anchorage, and I must be able to devote my whole attention to my vessel."

"I will not disturb you, Captain Brandon, and I only said what I did to provoke you."

"I have an aunt in Boston, and have long wished to visit her, and I took this opportunity of going."

"Then let us be friends, Hettie, and all will be well."

"Friends you and I can never be, Bert Brandon, but at least we need not be enemies."

"But I see Brewster Talbot on your vessel; is he one of your crew?"

"No; he engaged passage for the run to Boston, and Nick Napier to see, sir, going to seek service there," and Nick, and a sailor, turned and spoke to one of his other passengers who addressed him, having just then approached to where the young skipper and Hettie Lynn had been standing alone.

Having gotten out into the mouth of the river, Imp, who was the lookout aloft, called out in his shrill voice:

"Sail, ho!"

"I see her, Imp, and she is an English cruiser, but I believe we can run out without trouble."

The "run out" was made as the reader has seen, and Bert Brandon was delighted to get a chance to try the speed of his vessel under her new rig and alterations.

"That schooner I do not know, and she is either new, or newly rigged and painted."

"The British were building a schooner in Boston, captain, and that may be the one," said Brewster Talbot.

"Perhaps so, for I know of no craft in these waters to answer her description."

"They intended to make a racer out of her," continued Talbot.

"Well, she is either slow, or we are going very fast, for she is doing her best."

"Throw the line, Nick, and see what we are making."

"Nine knots," called out the mates, and an exclamation arose from all, for the breeze did not seem to be very stiff.

"She is doing well, then; but we have escaped her, and need not fear her now, so can get ready for the storm I see is going to break soon."

And so the lugger held on, saw the storm break upon the schooner, and not until she was hidden from view did Bert Brandon give orders to strip his vessel of sail.

Brewster Talbot and another passenger, both being good sailors, sprung to help in the work, and when the storm came the Mermaid met it splendidly, and instantly, under close-reefed sails, changed her course and headed right into the wind's eye.

As the reader remembers, she crept across the bows of the schooner in the mist, and the storm, and was dashing along far to the windward when the haze was blown away.

The fire of the Bother did the Mermaid no harm, Bert Brandon sending the lady passengers below, while it lasted, and after a pleasant run Boston Light was sighted the second night out, for the young skipper wished to run in under cover of the darkness.

"Will you run in through the main channel, Captain Brandon?" asked Brewster Talbot, who was watching the young skipper closely, as he stood, glass in hand, surveying the harbor.

"I feel certain that I should be brought to by the vessels, or guard-boats, if I took the main channels, and I do not care to lose any of my passengers, or crew, to have them transferred to the station-ship for British sailors, nor do I care to be taken myself," answered Bert Brandon calmly.

"We all have to take the risk of capture, though," said Nick Napier.

"Yes, and of death too, if you are fired on," put in Brewster Talbot.

"I might get by the fort all safe, as it would hardly fire on an incoming vessel; but if the guard-boats failed to bring me to, the schooner and station-ship would open fire, as they lay in a position to do so."

"But my desire is to risk no life on board, if I can avoid it, and so I shall try the Shirley Gut."

"You can never make it," said Brewster Talbot emphatically.

"I believe I can, for by the time I reach the bar the tide will be about the full flood, or very nearly so, and I know just what the Mermaid draws, and think we will have some six inches beneath our keel."

"A terribly close shave."

"True, Mr. Talbot, but not near so close as some of the shot from the ships may make."

"The wind is fair for us, and blowing very stiff, while the tide will also aid us, and we will fairly fly along, and any guard-boat that may be in our path, hovering about Governor's Island, will not dare to attempt to board us at such speed, while we will, however, have to take their fire."

"But the law is the Press-Gang cannot take a man from a vessel at anchor, and once past Governor's Island we are in the harbor proper and can soon after let fall our iron mud-book."

"You take big chances in going through the Shirley Gut, as I never heard of anything but the smallest smacks going that way," said Brewster Talbot.

"I have, and I know with this tide just what water we will have."

"If you strike you will carry your sticks out of her."

"I am as well convinced of that fact, Mr. Talbot, as I am that if we caught a broadside from the station-ship going the channel way, we would go to the bottom."

"It is a chance both ways, and I shall take my judgment in the matter."

"Why did you urge the channel way?" asked Hettie Lynn of Brewster Talbot a moment after.

"Because if he is ordered to come to, by the guns of a war-vessel, in port, and does not obey, he can be treated as a pirate, and would be too, after his last daring run out, while, if the guard-boats only try to board him, or stop him, if he can keep on without injury to the barge or its crew, it is not looked upon as worse than a determined effort to avoid being seized by the Press-Gang."

"He will run in his own way, if he destroys the vessel, you may be sure of that, Brewster Talbot; but can he get through the pass?" said the girl.

"Yes, I think so, for he knows just what water there is, and this is a full tide, and he knows also the draught of the lugger to half an inch."

"After running in between Deer Island and Shirley Point, he can worm his way around by Apple Island and thus get into the harbor all right, with only the guard-boats to fear, and not them, if they do not see him in the offing, for the frigate lies the other side of Governor's Island, and the station ship closer to the town, or they did when I was in port some weeks ago."

"But I heard some talk of a schooner-of-war?"

"Yes, Hettie, the Vicious; but I guess she's cruising down toward Nantasket, or about the Boston Light, just to accommodate Brandon; for he does have more luck than any man I ever saw."

"You do not fear to carry out your compact, do you, fearing his luck may defeat you?" she asked, coldly.

"Oh, no, not I, for luck often changes; but see, he has set more sail now and is heading in for the run," and the young sailor turned his attention now to the vessel, for she was flying along under full sail, the wind abeam, Bert Brandon was at the helm, and the crew stood at their posts, ready to obey the slightest command, while Imp went aloft to see if his keen eyes could ferret out a guard-boat or any other danger to threaten them on their perilous run into port.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RUN INTO PORT.

"Curse the fellow! he's as cool as though on a pleasure cruise!" said Brewster Talbot in an undertone to Hettie Lynn, as he saw Bert Brandon steering into the mouth of the narrow passage, with a hand that was firm as an iron brace, and his dark eyes taking in the way before him with a steady gaze.

The night was starlight, and far in the distance were visible the lights of Boston town, while just before had come faintly across the waters the tones of the old South Church clock striking the hour of midnight.

Potomac was forward at the jib balyard, and Kennebec stood by the fore-sheet, while Van Napier stood by the main sheet; his brother Nick, the mate, being in the starboard bow, holding the lead in hand and ready to cast it at a command from the young captain.

Up at the foremast-head was the boy, Imp, keeping a close watch ahead, and in fact upon all sides.

The passengers were grouped together just abaft the mainmast, excepting Hettie Lynn and Brewster Talbot, who stood astern, leaning over the rail, and very near to the skipper.

"Forward, there!" came in Bert Brandon's clear voice, and Nick Napier responded sharply:

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Cast the lead."

"Ay, ay, sir."

A moment after, the lead was swung far forward, and as the lugger passed over it, bringing the line perpendicular, came the call:

"Four fathoms!"

"That is as I thought, Nick," called back the skipper.

"Five fathoms!"

"Ay, ay."

"Five fathoms!"

"Ay ay, Nick, that will do just now. Keep a sharp eye aloft there, Imp, for we do not wish to run down a guard-boat if we can help it."

A few moments after, Bert Brandon said, addressing Talbot:

"This channel is winding, and hard to run at night, so one gets at fault now and then."

"Forward, there! throw the line again."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Then a moment of silence, and again came the cry from forward:

"Three fathoms!"

"Ay, ay, she is shoaling rapidly."

"Throw rapidly now, Nick."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Three fathoms!"

And thus the calls came steadily, ranging from two and a half fathoms to three, while the lugger fairly flew along, her skipper seeming to follow the winding channel solely from the depth of water.

"You seem to have plenty of water, Captain Brandon; much more than I thought, and the tide must be extra full," said Brewster Talbot.

"It is deep enough here, but we will find it shallow enough ahead, when we get near the bar," was the response.

"Two fathoms!"

There seemed a trifle of anxiety in the voice of the mate, as he a moment later called out:

"One fathom six!"

"Ay, ay, that is as good as I expected," cheerily answered the skipper, and the passengers drew a long breath.

"One fathom four!"

Then all eyes were turned upon Bert Brandon. But his hand was firm as a rock, as it rested upon the tiller, and he said nothing.

"One fathom two!"

The voice again seemed anxious, but the skipper showed no sign of nervousness, and the lugger still flew on.

"One fathom!"

Slowly did Bert Brandon rise from his sitting posture and stand at the helm, both hands now upon the tiller.

"Eight feet!"

"Ay, ay, Nick; throw as fast as you can," came the response, and then followed:

"Lads, give a haul on the halyards and make all as trim as you can."

"Ay, ay, sir," came from forward, while Brewster Talbot whispered to Hettie Lynn:

"I will help him at the helm, and a false movement now will wreck him, and then we are sure of his capture."

Instantly he stepped forward and said:

"She steers hard, Captain Brandon, so let me help you!" and he laid his hand upon the tiller.

"No, sir! hands off!"

The response was not only stern, but threatening, and the young man shrunk back and rejoined Hettie at the taffrail, while startling was the cry from forward:

"Seven and a half!"

The eyes of all were now again upon Bert Brandon; but he was calm, and silent, holding the rushing vessel unswervingly upon her way.

She was laying well over under the pressure of the wind, and this caused her to draw less than had she been sailing upon an even keel, and Bert Brandon knew it.

Behind her came a huge following sea, as proof of the shallow water; but she flew on as though she knew just where to avoid every danger.

All on board seemed to be holding their breath and motionless, excepting the tall, silent man at the helm, and he swayed to and fro as he kept the lugger on her course.

"Seven feet!" almost shrieked Nick Napier, and as he did so it seemed as though there was a slight grating sound beneath the vessel, and a momentary jar, as though her keel had touched.

But Bert Brandon uttered not a word, and still held on.

"Eight feet!" cried Nick Napier, in a joyous tone, to follow it a moment after with:

"One fathom six!"

"All right, Nick, we have crossed the bar, so you need not throw the line any longer."

"Ho, Imp! do you see where the ships-of-war are at anchor yet?"

"I see a big ship over the island," was the boy's answer.

"All right, we do not mind her, so you do not see the station-ship or schooner in our path."

"Yes, sir, I see a big boat, almost dead ahead."

"Ay, ay, I see it, and it is a guard-boat; but we have not yet been seen."

"My friends, you must all go below now, for we will soon be under fire," and he addressed the passengers, who obeyed with alacrity, excepting Hettie Lynn and Brewster Talbot.

"I said *all*, and you must go too, and lie flat on the cabin floor, for I see the station-ship now, and she may send a shot through us."

"I prefer to remain," said Hettie, firmly.

"I will not permit you to do so, Miss Lynn, so obey me, please."

"What if I refuse?" she said, tauntingly.

"I shall order the Indian and negro to carry you below."

"Then, if I am to be insulted, I shall obey."

"It is your own act that will make force necessary, for I will not allow you to remain on deck and risk death, when below you will be protected."

She walked quickly down the companionway, while Brewster Talbot remained.

"You are to go too, sir."

"I have a right to remain here, and I shall do so."

"You refuse?"

"I do, and shall kill the man who attempts to force me," and he drew a pistol from his breast pocket.

"Brewster Talbot, you seemed anxious awhile since, under a pretense of aiding me, to wreck my vessel, and you now desire to attract the attention of the guard-boat by a shot; but I warn you to go into that cabin without trouble."

"I shall not— Ha!"

His exclamation was caused by a dark object suddenly striking his pistol from his hand, and it fell upon the deck, while in an instant he was seized by Bert Brandon and thrown headlong into the cabin, the doors being quickly closed upon him.

As he grasped the tiller again, Bert said:

"Well done, Imp, that was a good shot with your coil," and he laughed lightly, for the boy had rolled a coil of rope, tied his cravat about it, and cast it from the main-top with true aim, knocking the weapon from Talbot's hand.

The lugger had momentarily swept up into the wind, as Bert Brandon had released the tiller, to seize Talbot, and the fluttering of her sails had been heard by the sleepy crew of the guard-boat, who at once discovered a vessel under full sail, almost upon them.

"The Flying Dutchman!" one superstitious seaman had cried, and his comrades were about to agree with him, for no one had expected to see a vessel in that part of the harbor, when the lieutenant in command shouted:

"Silence, you infernal cowards!"

"It is a Yankee coaster that has run in through Shirley Gut, and we must capture her."

"Marines, attention! Oarsmen, give way! head her as the craft is going, coxswain, and one of you men stand ready to cast a grapnel as we range alongside, and when I give the order."

"She'll drag us under, sir, at the speed at which she is going, if we catch on to her," returned the coxswain.

"I believe you are right, coxswain, so I'll hail and order her to come to; if she refuses, the marines must fire on her helmsman, and she'll breach to, and then we can board."

"That is a good plan, sir, and she's ours."

Having cleared the Shirley Gut in safety, Bert Brandon altered the course of the lugger from west to south, close-hauled, as she had been going, to northwest one-half north, the crew tending the sheet-ropes nimbly as she was more freely put away before the wind.

Boston now was visible, some two miles distant, marked by its glimmering lights, and the shipping at anchor in the harbor could be placed by their lights, while the station-ship was seen distinctly from the lugger's decks.

"Heave the log, Nick, and see what we are making," quietly said the skipper.

The log was hove, and the answer came:

"Ten knots."

"Good! that guard-boat won't dare attempt to board us, knowing we would run him under; but he'll fire on us, and with musketry, for it is a barge, and doubtless carries half a score of marines, so every man of you lay flat to leeward, and the hull and bulwarks will catch their bullets."

"Hark! he hails!"

The barge was now but a short distance ahead, running on the same course the lugger was making, and stern came the order:

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the barge!" answered Bert Brandon.

"Round to, or I'll fire into you!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and yet the lugger did not swerve.

"Round to, you infernal Yankee, or I'll fire into you!"

No reply came, and then the order was heard:

"Fire!"

A dozen muskets rattled, and came pattering like hail over the vessel, while Bert Brandon felt one bullet strike the tiller near his hand.

But he had stooped low, only his hand on the helm being exposed, and not a bit of harm had been done.

At the same time the Mermald swept by the barge as though it was at anchor.

"Throw the grapnel! pull hard! lay her alongside! fire!"

The orders were given wildly, the men tried to obey them, the grapnel missed and fell with a plunge in the water, pulling the coxswain overboard, for he was entangled in the cable, and a few of the crew fired their pistols.

But on flew the lugger leaving the men in the barge utterly demoralized, and fishing for the unfortunate coxswain.

The firing of the musketry had given an alarm, and rockets went up from the frigate, were answered on board the station-ship, then from the signal-station on Copp's Hill.

Next came a rocket roaring upward from the castle, then from far down the bay, where the schooner-of-war Vicious was cruising, and one after another the different guard-boats scattered about from Apple Island to the Charles River sent up their signals.

But from whence had come the alarm no one seemed to know, as the reports of the muskets had been heard by all on the watch, but not seen, and the coxswain had fallen overboard with his hand full of rockets and thus prevented the barge from signaling.

In the mean time the Mermald swept on over the dark waters like a phantom, until a blue light, burned on board the flagship, revealed the daring vessel, and instantly orders were given to clear a gun for action.

But before it could be done, she swept in among a group of vessels at anchor, her sails were rapidly taken in, and in a few minutes more she had run up into the wind, her anchor had been let fall, and she lay quiet, rocking upon the waters, safe in port, after a most plucky and gallant cruise from the Kennebec.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BOARDED IN PORT.

TEN minutes after the Mermald Bessie had let go her anchor, she had her sails neatly furled, and all on deck in shipshape condition.

The run in to an anchorage had created great excitement in the harbor, among the shipping, and the crews of the different vessels were regarding the pretty craft with considerable interest, delighted at her clever run in and the thwarting of the guard-boats.

They also wished to see what would follow, whether the British patrols would board her or not, and they leaned to the belief that they would, as those were times when the English rulers did pretty much as they pleased.

As soon as his vessel was in trim at her anchorage, Bert Brandon went into the cabin to see his cabin passengers.

They sat there, eight in number, and four of them females, among the latter Hettie Lynn.

Brewster Talbot sat there, black as a thunder-cloud, at having entered the cabin in a heap, and so unexpectedly, and it had added fire to his fury to find that when he had said a lurch of the vessel had thrown him from his feet, a quiet smile went round the faces of all.

"No use telling falsehoods, Brewster Talbot, for we heard all, and we saw you fired into the cabin as though you had come out of a big gun," said an old maid who, in spite of the hard times had come down to Boston to buy "notions" to tempt the girls in and around Bath.

"And it served you right, for Capturing Bert were doing his best and knew his business, and we come with him when we wouldn't have come with any other skipper, and here we are, safe in Bosting, and if you'd have had your way I don't believe we'd be here now," said Miss Slimpsey, a rival notion dealer, who never before had been known to agree with Miss Peggy Crimps upon any subject whatever.

"Capturing Bert has done what nobody else could have done, and I go back with him, if his passage money is double," a Bath storekeeper said.

"Yes, and he could have got double coming down if he had wanted it, but he said he only wanted what was fair in advance of the regular price, owing to the risk he ran with his vessel," another said.

And others too spoke in the praise of the young captain, until Brewster Talbot was alone, as he saw, with his grievances against Bert Brandon, for Hettie Lynn lay back on the sofa, pretending to be asleep.

"This seems to be a Bert Brandon Admiration Society," growled Brewster Talbot.

"It is," was the affirmative response from all.

Just then the skipper came down the companionway, and he said pleasantly:

"Well, my friends, we are safe in port, and you are at liberty to go ashore if you wish it, though I think you had better retire and wait until morning."

"Here, Mr. Talbot, is your pistol which Imp so skillfully disarmed you of, and let me say to you, that if you have any idea of, returning in my vessel, give it up, for I will not allow you to set foot in her again, and now get your traps together for I shall put you ashore."

"You see, friends, how he treats me?" cried the young man.

"Yes, and he does right," came in a chorus.

"He uses his power," sneered Hettie Lynn.

"I am on my own vessel, true, Miss Lynn, and have the right and power to do as I please; but if Mr. Talbot considers himself aggrieved, he knows that I am not one to shrink the responsibility of my acts and words."

"There you got it, Hettie Lynn," snapped Miss Polly Slimpsey.

"Yes, you had better pretended to be asleep," added Miss Peggy Crimps, and the two old maids again had a thought in common.

"You shall rue your words and acts to me, Bert Brandon," savagely said Brewster Talbot.

"I fear no open foe, sir, only an assassin, who strikes at my back."

"Come, are you ready?"

"I am," and he followed the skipper on deck, and Kennebec was alongside with the lugger's small boat, for she carried a light skiff, in addition to her yawl at the stern davits, the former being taken aboard and lashed to the deck.

"You tell your mates that he has made a mistake in making Brewster Talbot angry," hissed the young profligate, as he reached the deck.

"Him don't care," was the laconic response of Kennebec, as he returned on board the lugger.

Hardly had the skiff been drawn aboard, when Nick Napier said:

"There are two guard-boats rowing slowly among the shipping, Captain Bert, examining every vessel."

"All right, Nick, we are in port at anchor, we did them no harm, and they cannot, according to the law, touch us."

One of the boats soon drew near, and it was examining, as Nick Napier had said, every vessel as it came along, that had any resemblance to the lugger which had dashed in safety through the Shirley Gut.

The passengers had remained on deck, after

seeing Brewster Talbot off, and discovering the guard-boat approaching, did not go below.

There were a number of vessels in port, many not daring to attempt to run out, fearing their crews would be seized the moment they left their anchorage, and others there were who had discharged their men, the skipper alone remaining on board to care for his craft.

Into the midst of them, and there were vessels of all sizes, from the brig to the smack, the lugger had made her way before coming to anchor, and thus had thrown the distant guard-boats at fault.

Nearer and nearer drew the boat, and then discovering the lugger, rowed toward her.

"Guard-boat ahoy!" came in the deep voice of Bert Brandon.

"Ahoy, the lugger! what craft is that?"

"The Mermaid Bessie, out of Kennebec River, Bert Brandon master," was the calm response.

"I am going to board you, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir, come on board with pleasure."

A moment after and the guard-boat ranged alongside, and a lieutenant, a middy and four marines sprung on deck.

"I do not understand your boarding a peaceable craft in force, sir," sternly said the young skipper.

"You will soon understand it, sir."

"Did you not just drop anchor?"

"Half an hour ago, I did, sir."

"You ran into port by the Shirley Gut?"

"I did, sir."

"And refused to come to when ordered to do so?"

"I did."

"And why did you disobey the command of a king's officer?" was the haughty query.

"I have a cargo and passengers on board, and it depended upon me to get all to the port which they paid their money to reach."

"As I was coming into port, I certainly could not be disobeying any laws, and I refused to obey the king's officer, as I knew, if he boarded me out of the harbor, he would take from me my crew."

"I gained an anchorage, and the port bill law does not allow you to touch me, my crew, my passengers or cargo, and the fine for disobeying the hail I will pay to-morrow when ordered before the board of examiners to do so."

The British lieutenant was struck with the manly bearing and handsome face of the young skipper, and his polite but forcible way of speaking.

He knew too that he spoke the truth, and yet, accustomed to do just as he pleased, where the colonists were concerned, he determined to arrest him and take him as a hostage for his vessel, so he said:

"It is my duty to make you prisoner, and—"

"One moment, Lieutenant Farwell," said the middy who had boarded with him, and he called his superior aside.

"Well, Bronx?" asked the officer as he stepped a few feet away.

"As that skipper stood in the light of the companionway, sir, I recognized him," whispered the middy.

"A pirate, or a smuggler?"

"Neither, sir; but you remember I was with Captain Delafield and the ladies, the day that Lieutenant Nelson attempted to impress a young skipper ashore?"

"Yes, but—"

"This is the same one, sir."

"What! the man who so daringly escaped us?"

"Yes, sir, the same."

"Egad, he looks it, Bronx!"

"He does, sir, and you know he has a pardon."

"True; I will have to go slow, and I am obliged, Midshipman Bronx, for your timely words," and the officer returned to his former position and asked:

"What is the name of your vessel, skipper?"

"The Mermaid Bessie, sir."

"And what cargo have you?"

"An assorted cargo, sir, from the Kennebec, with eight passengers, four of whom are ladies."

"When do you expect to sail?"

"I have set no day, sir, as it seems hard work to get out of port on time," and Bert Brandon smiled.

"You are right; but as soon as you get your cargo out and return freight in, you expect to go?"

"I expect to try," was the significant response.

"May I ask your name?"

"Bert Brandon, sir."

"There was a lugger here in port some two months ago, and her name was the Mermaid, and her skipper was, if I mistake not, one Bert Brandon."

"This is the vessel, sir, and I am the one to whom you doubtless refer," was the modest reply.

"But that craft was a smaller one, and though a wonderfully fast sailer, by no means so trim in build and rig."

"I have altered my vessel somewhat, sir, in hull and rig, to add to her speed, as I deemed it necessary."

"I see, and you are the daring gantlet-runner

of guard-boats, ships and fort?" and the officer gazed into the face of the handsome young American with surprise.

"I managed to get out to sea, sir, after some little trouble," was the reply, and a smile crossed the face of the young man.

"Yes, we all discovered the fact, and gave you credit for even more than the superior Yankee pluck and cleverness we see so much of here."

"But did you not see the schooner-of-war, sir?"

"What schooner-of-war, may I ask?"

"The Bother."

"I know no such vessel, sir, though I may say that all of your war-vessels are a bother to me."

"Aha! well said; but when did you leave the Kennebec?"

"Three days ago."

"And you saw no schooner-of-war?"

"Oh, yes, sir; one was heading into the mouth of the river as we ran out."

"Did she not bring you to?"

"No, sir."

"You were too far off?"

"No, sir, we were uncomfortably near, for us."

"It was night, and she failed to see you, may-be?"

"No, she saw us, for it was broad daylight; but we outsailed her."

The lieutenant looked at the middy, and the middy glanced at the marines.

All looked surprised.

"You mean to say that you outfooted that schooner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe her!"

"A schooner of two hundred tons with very tall raking masts, an immense spread of canvas on long spars, all new, the hull black with a red belt, and a broadside of four guns, with a pivot gun on her fore-castle."

"It was the Bother; but did she try to catch you?"

"We thought she was doing her best."

"You had the wind of her?"

"On the contrary, she had the wind of us, and drove us down the wind."

"Then I changed my course, throwing the wind abeam, as I did not care to be driven so far out to sea, and we ran thus for awhile, when one of the those sudden storms came up, and the haze hiding us, I worked to windward and dropped the Bother, if it was that vessel."

"There is one thing makes me doubt its being the Bother!"

"Yes, sir?"

"That you got away from her, for she walked away from the Vicious going out, and is what we considered our fastest vessel in these waters."

"Was the Bother going to the Kennebec, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then that was she without doubt, and she looked like a fast racer; but the Mermaid is the swifter of the two."

"Well, Mr. Brandon, I guess it's all right, you running in as you did to-night, so I'll not arrest you, and in a few days the Bother will be back in port, and I know that Captain Nelson wished to see you, for he commands her, so don't go until you see him."

"Good-night, sir," and the lieutenant and his men returned to their boat and rowed away, meeting a cable's length off the other guard-boat, which after a short parley followed the first one back down the harbor, to the great delight of those on board the lugger.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SIGNAL LIGHTS.

If Bert Brandon had seemed severe in his treatment of Brewster Talbot, he certainly had cause, for the afternoon the lugger arrived off Massachusetts Bay, Imp had picked up a piece of paper which he had seen dropped by Hettie Lynn.

He meant to return it to her at once; but Imp had a boy's curiosity, which is hardly second to that of a woman's, and so just read what was written on the paper.

Furthermore, he had seen Brewster Talbot slip the paper into the girl's hand, and when she read it, she meant to drop it overboard, and supposed that she had; but an eddy of wind had blown it inboard again and along the deck to the boy's convenient hand.

Imp was a poor scholar, so he took the paper to Potomac, who was a worse one, and then the two sought Kennebec, who said he could "talk heap English, but no read it."

Then, the Indian and the negro knowing the history of the paper, advised Imp to carry it to the captain.

Bert Brandon opened it mechanically and read, his attention at once riveted by what he saw.

It was as follows:

"MY DEAR HETTIE:—

"No opportunity offers here for me to tell you of my plan to get Brandon into the hangman's noose; but I will call upon you in Boston, so give me your address on a slip of paper."

"In running in, if he attempts Shirley Gut, I may, in pretending to aid him, ground the lugger, and that will end the craft, and he will soon follow."

"Destroy this, and be assured, to win the prize you offer me, that B—— is doomed."

"Yours, B.T."

This very interesting missive Bert Brandon put into his pocket, remarking to Imp:

"This is a little slip of paper I shall keep, Imp, and if I could make you a middy for it, I would."

"I won't let you forget it, Master Bert, if you ever get to command a war-vessel."

"Nor will I, Imp," and from that moment Bert Brandon knew there was a plot between Brewster Talbot and Hettie Lynn to get rid of him, while the "prize" spoken of in the note, he could readily conjecture, was the hand of the maiden.

"Her love must have been intense, if her hatred can be so bitter," he muttered, and he kept his eye upon the movements of the two, though not in a way to cause suspicion in their minds.

When the gantlet was run in safety, and Brewster Talbot had gone ashore, the guard-boat came alongside, and the young skipper was kept busy getting all ready to discharge his cargo the next morning at sunrise, so he had little time for thought regarding what his enemy might do.

His passengers left early, promising to notify him of their address in town, so that they could be informed just when he would set sail, for all seemed to wish to return with him to the Kennebec, the run to Boston having been so successful.

Employing a number of idle men on the wharves to unload the lugger, the cargo was rapidly discharged, Nick Napier superintending the work, while Bert Brandon went up in town to select freight to carry back with him.

By night the cargo was discharged, and the ones to which it had been consigned had taken it away, while boxes and bales for the return had begun to arrive in quantities.

Anxious to remain no longer in port than was necessary, Bert Brandon sent Imp around to the addresses of his passengers, telling them he would sail the next night, and to be on board soon after dark.

But his cargo was put on board, and, to his surprise, he found the largest quantity was for one merchant in Bath, very little having been sent for any one else.

Then night came, and with it none of his passengers, and he hurried Imp and Potomac off to the addresses to hasten them.

But the boy and the negro returned with word that they were not going back by the vessel, but would take the stage.

"Well, I am really glad, for if we are fired upon, then some of them might be hurt, while, as it is, we have a good-paying freight."

"Well, lads, we will get ready to run out, and we have a stiff breeze in our favor, and can run out on the last of the ebb tide, so will fairly fly down the harbor."

"Will you take the passage through Shirley Gut, sir?" asked Nick Napier.

"No; I shall go the regular channel, and trust to luck, for I think if they had intended to trouble me it would have been done the two days I have been in port, for the guard-boat officer certainly reported what we were."

"It would seem so, sir," answered Nick Napier, and the lugger was at once cast off from the dock, her sails set, and she sped away under a cloud of canvas.

Taking the helm himself, Bert Brandon guided her skillfully through the numerous vessels at anchor, receiving a kindly word now and then from some skipper, an admiring one from another, and again the remark:

"You take big chances, capt'ing, in that flying-machine o' yours."

With every man at his post to man the braces, and Imp perched forward on the bows to keep a lookout for guard-boats, the Mermaid Bessie flew along, while her skipper said to Mate Napier, who stood near him:

"Nick, you asked me why I set those three lanterns to-night, and I did not tell you."

"Yes, sir, for I thought we would do better without any lights showing."

"Do you observe the frigate?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are her lights?"

"Blue to starboard, green to port, and red at the foretop."

"And the station-ship?"

"Shows the same, sir."

"Did you observe that the guard-boat that tried to bring us to when we came in had three lights?"

"I recall it now that she did."

"You remember what they were?"

"Blue, green and red, I think."

"You saw the schooner pass up through the shipping at anchor last night, as though looking for a black sheep in the flock?"

"Yes, sir."

"She carried the same lights."

"You are right; so she did."

"Guard-boat dead ahead, moving eastward across our bows," came from Imp for ward.

"Ay, ay, I see it," was the answer, and again addressing Nick, he continued:

"What lights had that guard-boat?"

"A red one on her bows and green and blue starboard and port astern."

"When I ran out before, the war-vessels carried their regular lights, and the guard-boats simply a red lantern on the bows, so this change is a private signal known to all, and I believe I can get through on it; at least I can try."

"Captain Bert, you are a wonder to me, for who but you would ever have thought of those lights, and making capital out of them?"

"I noticed the change in the guard-boat near Deer Island as soon as I saw her as we came through Shirley Channel; but see, the guard-boat yonder does not attempt to bar our way."

"That is so; but should the frigate or station-ship open?"

"I'll risk their fire," was the determined response.

"It looks as though the lights were working all right, sir."

"I hope they will, for another such an iron storm as we went through two months ago I have no desire to face; but I will, rather than yield."

The guard-boat was passed with a rush, no hail coming from it, the frigate remained silent and grim, no shot came from the station-ship, and at tremendous speed, for she had the tide with her and a ten-knot breeze, the Mermaid Bessie flew by the somber castle with its frowning batteries, which two months before had thundered such an iron hail upon her.

"We have run the gantlet unchallenged, Nick, and yonder is the schooner-of-war Vicious, heading to cross our course, but she will fall far astern, at the rate we are going, even if she meant to be hostile," said Bert Brandon.

"Yes, and she carries your lights, and I am inclined to think that they got you through, captain."

"I judge they did; at least it did not harm to try them; but see there!"

As he spoke a signal-rocket went up from Copp's Hill, and immediately after a number were sent flying in the air like many-colored serpents.

The frigate promptly responded, and then came a lull, which the schooner, off on the starboard beam of the lugger answered.

"There's something wrong up-town," said Nick.

"I guess they have discovered we came out against orders—see! the Vicious is crowding on more sail, and there comes a shot from her pivot-gun for us to come to."

And as Bert Brandon spoke, the flash of a gun on the bows of the schooner illumined the scene, and a shot came roaring through the air, passing astern of the lugger.

"That was meant to cross our bows, but they miscalculated our speed, and we are not obeying orders to-night even from brazen throats."

And Bert Brandon devoted his attention to getting all the speed out of the lugger that he could, for the schooner was too near for comfort, and her pivot-gun was a heavy one.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE THREE VESSELS.

THE Bother arrived in sight of the Boston Light, on her return, about the time the shot from the Vicious was fired to bring the lugger to.

Upon her deck, for it was a pleasant evening, were Lieutenant Nelson and his guests, the latter having determined to remain up and enjoy the run in by night.

The rockets sent up were seen as they soared from the signal-station on Copp's Hill, and the answering signals from the frigate and next from the schooner out in the offing.

"That means mischief of some kind," said Captain Delafield.

"Perhaps the lugger is running in," suggested the secretary.

"No, he is due long before this; and had such been the case, of a vessel running in, it would have been first signaled from the craft in the offing, which is without doubt my old schooner," replied Lieutenant Nelson.

"True, Nelson; so it is a vessel running out, and they are waking up the Vicious to give her ample time to head her off," Captain Delafield responded.

"It may be the lugger running out," suggested Madge.

"Would he attempt that fearful gantlet again, do you think?" asked Lady Lulu.

"He would attempt any deed of daring, would that young skipper, Lady Lulu; but he can hardly have gotten in and been ready to run out so soon."

"Do you see the schooner, Nelson?"

"Yes, captain; I just found her by her lights, and—"

"Sail ho!"

"You mean the schooner coming toward us, my man?" asked Neal Nelson, of the man aloft.

"I did mean her, sir, but there's a vessel crossing her bows, and she's just loaded with canvas."

"Ay, ay, I see her now, and by Neptune's head! it is the lugger!"

"Running in?" cried the secretary excitedly, as all sprung to their feet and strained their eyes over the dark waters.

"No, indeed! she is running out, in fact is out, for she is in a line now with Boston Light, and is dashing seaward with the wind over her starboard quarter, and the Vicious is standing toward her at full speed with the breeze almost astern—Hark! the Vicious fires to bring her to," and the roar of the gun came to their ears.

"Does she obey?" asked Madge anxiously.

"No, indeed, she holds on as before."

"Then she has again run the gantlet of fire?" asked Lady Lulu.

"No, had the ships and forts fired upon her, we would have heard it, so that very clever young Yankee skipper has played some very cunning trick to get out to sea, and he has accomplished his purpose."

"The Vicious may bring him to, Nelson."

"Not unless she aims better than the two shots she has fired at him."

"See, the lugger is fairly flying, and the Vicious is coming booming along upon her best point of sailing."

"And the lugger has passed the line of fire, as she now heads," said Captain Delafield.

"She has, and now it becomes a stern chase—but there is a signal from the schooner, and it is to me, for they have sighted us," and lantern signals were set upon the Vicious.

"That reads:

"Help me to bring that rascal to," said Neal Nelson, reading his signal book by the binnacle light.

"Answer him, Lieutenant Waters, that we have a pardon for the skipper of the Mermaid, for that surely is that craft."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the response signals were made.

"There comes an answer," and Lieutenant Waters read it aloud:

"The fellow has been in more mischief, for the flagship signaled stop him or sink him."

"I must do my duty with such an order from the admiral, though I cannot believe that Brandon can have done ought to warrant such an order, at least intentionally," said Neal Nelson, after the surprise of all had been expressed.

"Mr. Vane, clear the bow pivot, and fire a shot across the bows of the lugger."

"Ay, ay, sir," and a few moments after the shot was fired.

"That went astern, sir," called out Neal Nelson sternly.

"Ay, ay, sir, but she is going like lightning, for I aimed three points ahead."

"I'll try it again," and a second shot also flew astern.

The position of the lugger was a dangerous one, for she was between two fires, the Vicious being about half a mile distant upon her starboard quarter, and firing steadily, while the Bother was nearly a mile away on her port beam, and also firing.

Between the two the lugger was flying seaward, while the cruisers were pointing for her and sailing toward each other.

All three vessels were now under full sail, the Mermaid Bessie running along before the wind with all drawing well, the Vicious with the wind on her port quarter, her sails eased off to catch the wind at its best, and the Bother having the breeze directly abeam, and her canvas hauled taut until the sails were flat as boards.

The fire of the two vessels was kept up rapidly and yet with no effect that could be discovered.

"It is cruel, cruel!" exclaimed Lady Lulu, "to fire upon that little craft, and I do hope she will get away."

"I cannot think what her skipper has been up to, Lady Lulu, but I agree with you it does not seem fair to have two cruisers worrying an unarmed vessel," said Lieutenant Nelson, walking slightly apart with the maiden.

"It is like huge dogs worrying a sheep," Lady Lulu said angrily.

"You may be sure of one thing, Lady Lulu!" and Neal Nelson spoke in a whisper.

"What may I be sure of, Lieutenant Nelson?"

"That no shot from this vessel will harm the lugger."

"Ah! is your gunner such a bad shot?" she asked quickly, looking straight in his face.

"Under orders not to hit a target, he is, Lady Lulu, though generally Midshipman Vane is our crack shot with a heavy gun."

"I saw you speak with Mr. Vane apart when he started forward to clear the gun for action, and I thank you, Lieutenant Nelson."

"I am happy in deserving your thanks, Lady Lulu."

"And Madge will thank you too, if you will let me tell her, for she is deeply interested in the young skipper also."

"You may tell her, certainly, but let it remain a secret between us four—see how that shot of Vane's went far astern."

"Yes, he fires around the lugger, but does not hit it, and neither does the Vicious."

"Her crew is new upon her, and that pivot gun on her bows requires long study from a

gunner to get its range and possibilities; but the lugger has passed from between us now, and it's a stern chase, so I must give orders to ease off the shots, and in half an hour if a shot from the Vicious does not bring her to, we will be running side by side with the schooner."

"She is ahead of us now?"

"Yes, a couple of cable-lengths, but I think we can overhaul her readily, and then see what the Mermaid Bessie can do with us," and the order was given to follow in the wake of the lugger.

"What a remarkable girl that sweet creature is, Lieutenant Nelson," said Lady Lulu, as the officer returned to her side.

"She is a lovely girl, and a marvel as you say, Lady Lulu, while her manners are as elegant as though she were brought up in the most fashionable society, instead of on that wild, picturesque river."

"And her mother is a lady, too, and there must be some mystery regarding them."

"One would think so, when we take all into consideration; but we are nearing the Vicious, and creeping up on her too."

"Yes, we certainly are, while the lugger seems to be dropping us."

"True, she is doing it in splendid style, Lady Lulu, and like the Brandons, the lugger is a marvel, for I never saw anything that could sail with her."

"There is something in the way she is handled too, is there not?"

"Oh, yes, everything; but she is a wonderful speedy boat, and Brandon gets out of her everything she is capable of."

"Ah! that shot fell short."

"And so did the shot of the Vicious."

"Yes, the lugger is further away than she appears to be, and dropping us steadily and rapidly."

"I will hail the schooner."

The two vessels were now close together, hardly double their length divided them, and the sharp bows of the Bother were about even with the foremast of the Vicious and slowly creeping up to her.

"Ahoy, Farwell!" cried Lieutenant Nelson.

"Ay, ay, Nelson, how are you?"

"All well on board, thank you; but we are getting distanced in our race."

"Did you ever see such a flying-machine as that lugger is?"

"I never did; but what has she been doing?"

"Heaven only knows, for she ran in two nights ago through the Shirley Gut, swept by the guard-boat in a style that was splendid, got to her anchorage, and her skipper was not molested, as you had his pardon; but to-night she came flying seaward with the new signal-lights set, and passed everything until I got the signal to bring her to or sink her."

"You say she went in through Shirley Gut?"

"Clean as a whistle."

"And was not molested at her anchorage?"

"No, she discharged her cargo, got another aboard, and out she came flying to-night with the red, blue and green lights set."

"How did she get them?"

"I can never tell, any more than I can catch her."

"Then we must give her up?"

"If we don't, she'll give us up soon, for she is dropping us as though we were anchored, and I'm getting lonesome, as I see you forging ahead, too."

"I will give up the chase and put back, for it is waste of wind to use it up chasing that lugger."

"I'm with you," was the ready answer, and the two vessels went about and began to beat their way back to port, while the lugger went skimming away over the seas, looking like a specter craft fading away in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BESSIE MAKES A VISIT.

THE second day after the adventure on the river, Bessie sailed up to the town to see how Ray Denning was, having the half-fear in her heart that she would find him dead.

But, to her delight she found that he was not considered fatally wounded, though seriously, for, bad as he was, she did not wish him to die, as his mattered words had told her, if the doctor said he could not live, he would accuse her of having shot him; still, outside of this personal consideration, she hoped he would recover.

Having made the inquiry regarding him, she went to the inn, to call upon Hettie Lynn.

The landlord met her with his blandest smile, for he had always admired the beautiful girl, and informed her that Hettie had sailed in the lugger for Boston.

This was a surprise to Bessie, for she knew that her brother did not suspect that she would be his passenger.

Declining to dine at the inn, at the host's urgent entreaty, she made a few purchases and was going to her boat, when the landlord joined her.

"I'm out for a little walk, Miss Bessie, so will see you to your boat, with your kind permission."

"Certainly, Squire Lynn," answered Bessie, for the landlord was a squire.

"Miss Bessie," continued the landlord: "What is the matter between Master Bert and my Hettie?"

"I really could not tell you, sir."

"Did you know that they were out, as I may say?"

"No, squire."

"Well, I felt very sure that my Hettie loved Master Bert, and he was such a splendid fellow, I was very glad, though I never of course had a word with him upon the subject."

"But of late she seems to have changed her manner, told me flatly she hated Master Bert, and was as thick as thieves with that vile fellow Brewster Talbot, before she sailed."

"Yet, for all that she went to Boston to visit her aunt, and sailed on the Mermaid, while Ray Deming also went along."

"Now I don't exactly understand it all, so I thought I would ask you if Master Bert had referred to it."

"He did not, I think, know that Hettie was going on the lugger, squire, for he spoke of Miss Slimpsey, Miss Crimps and the others, and said that one state-room, the best, had been engaged by some one, but who he did not know."

"That was for Hettie, and she would not let it be known she was going, for some reason."

"I wish I could understand it all, Miss Bessie, for it worries me."

"Don't worry, squire, for it will be all right I am sure, as Hettie is one who can take care of herself anywhere, and I heard that Brewster Talbot was going to Boston to engage in the service."

"He'll never work, Miss Bessie, as long as others will support him, and he is a man to fear and avoid."

"But here we are at your boat, and you have a good breeze for your sail down."

"Yes, sir, and I will enjoy it, for I love the water."

"You are a good hand with a boat, too, Miss Bessie, and your brother is the best sailor that runs into the Kennebec; but then your father was a sailor, and you come by it justly."

"I often think of him, Miss Bessie, and hope he may turn up, for I cannot understand his disappearing as he did."

"Mother has hope, too, squire, but I cannot but feel that my father is dead; but good-by," and Bessie sprang into her little skiff, and the next minute was skimming along over the waters on her way home.

"I wonder if my father can be alive?" she murmured, as she sailed along.

"Mother will not believe that he is dead, and if he had been drowned, his boat would certainly have been found somewhere along the coast."

"Father was a splendid sailor, the weather was not bad at the time he left home, and what happened to him heaven only knows."

After awhile she mused aloud once more, but her thoughts had taken a different channel, for she said:

"Now who could have fired that shot at Ray Deming?"

"It came from one of the embrasures of the fort, that is certain, and yet no one lives there, or anywhere within leagues of it."

"The fishermen dread it, as they say it is haunted, and it was built upon an old Indian burying-ground, it is true, and a number of soldiers are buried there."

"But then I don't believe much in ghosts, and would not mind going there, though I never heard of any one else doing so excepting brother Bert."

"But then Bert would go anywhere, and when he was a boy he slept there one night, I remember, in sheer bravado."

"I believe I will run down the river, about the time to expect brother Bert back, and take a look at the old ruined fort, for I have always had a curiosity to land there."

As she neared the cove, she saw her mother seated on the rustic bench outside of the cabin, watching for her, and waving her hand sailed into the little basin.

Upon joining her mother at the arbor, she told her of Ray Deming's condition, and then of the conversation that Squire Lynn had had with her.

"Why, I am surprised that Hettie should go by the lugger, when she expressed such feelings against Bert," said Mrs. Brandon, and the two talked the matter over, trying to arrive at a solution of the affair, as they had both had reason to believe that Hettie Lynn had loved Bert, and really had begun to think, until the words of the young man upon the subject some days before, that he cared for the maiden.

But the mystery of Hettie's conduct could not be solved, and knowing what she had said and done, both mother and daughter felt glad that Bert had not compromised himself with the "Maid of the Inn," as the impulsive beauty was called by the Kennebec skippers.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HOPE REALIZED.

"MOTHER, sometimes I feel brother is on his way back, and should be in the river to-day, for he had no idea of remaining longer than was absolutely necessary, you know, and he has had very fair wind and weather," said Bessie Bran-

don to her mother, one morning after the lugger had been gone a week or more.

"We will go out to the arbor and spend the day there," said Mrs. Brandon.

"How would you like to go down the river to meet the lugger, mother?"

"No, Bessie, I do not care for a sail."

"Then I would like to go, mother."

"Do not remain until late, Bessie, as I will be most anxious about you, after your adventure of the other evening."

"No fear of any danger from Roy Deming, mother, as he will not be out of bed for a month, and besides, I will take my rifle and pistols this time."

And so Bessie kissed her mother good-by, put a little snack in a basket, and getting her rifle and pistols, started down the cove.

As she stepped into her skiff she called back:

"I will shoot some game, mother, and catch some sea fish, so if I do not meet brother, my trip will not be a useless one."

"Be careful, Bessie, for somehow I am very anxious about you of late," called back Mrs. Brandon, as the little skiff moved out into the river, under the impulse of the oars, for seldom was it that any breeze penetrated the cove, shut in as it was on three sides by high hills and overhanging cliffs.

Once free of the cove, she laid aside her oars, seized her sheet-ropes, and taking her seat astern laid her hand upon the tiller.

Away darted the skiff, as the wind caught its sail, and down the river it went at a good pace, the maiden keeping well out to get all the breeze she could.

"I will go out and catch some fish first, then stop on the point and kill some squirrels and quail, and take my dinner later at the fort, for I can wait there until an hour before sunset, and if brother does not come, can row home by dark, if the wind fails me, which I do not believe it will."

"Let me see—yes, I have the tide with me, and so I need have no dread, should the lugger not appear."

So saying the maiden sailed merrily along, and, rounding a bend she had a chance for a shot at a squirrel, and quick as a flash she fired and the bullet pierced the brain of the little animal, that had been so saucily regarding her from a tree overhanging the water.

Hastily loading her rifle, she got a second squirrel, shooting with the same true aim as before, and taking a short run in the woods came back with three quail.

"I have gotten my game within half an hour, so have done well," she said gayly, as she returned to the skiff, and began to pluck the feathers from the birds as she sailed along, thereby saving time, while she steered with the tiller against her knee.

By the time she reached the fort, the squirrels and quail had been nicely dressed and placed beneath the seat where it was cool, and she eyed the stern old fortress with mingled awe and interest.

Running out past Cape Small Point, she dropped her kedge, raised an awning over the boat, to shield her from the sun, and began to fish.

She had taken a position that gave her a good view of the ocean, and far off was visible a sail upon the waters.

It was too far off, however, for her to decide whether it was a frigate or a fishing-smack.

The fish bit briskly at her hooks, and before very long she had caught enough for half a dozen messes, for they could be put away in the ice house which Potomac and Kennebec had built back in the glen, where ice hardly ever melted the year around, so cool and shady was the nook.

The skiff had a fish well in it, and into this they were placed, and feeling hungry, for my heroine was no æsthetic maiden, she determined to run back to the fort, have her dinner, and then make a tour of inspection of the ruin and its surroundings.

The sail she had seen had disappeared, having stood inshore, until hidden from view, so she gave up all hope of seeing the lugger that day, and determined to wholly satisfy her curiosity upon the subject of the fortress.

"Who knows," she said, gayly, "but that I may find some old soldier there who has never deserted his post, and he may have been the one who saved me from Ray Deming."

"How romantic that would be," and her musical laugh at the conceit made the rocks send back many an echo as she skimmed along.

As she drew near the fort the somber look it wore toned down her gay spirits.

She held in close to the shore, and passed by before she decided just where she would land.

"The fact is, I believe I am afraid," she said, as she put her skiff about.

"It does look strangely gloomy, and so silent and stern," she said.

"But I must not back out now, that is certain, while really I am very hungry."

"So, here goes."

She ran the skiff ashore as she spoke, sprang out, and made the painter fast to a large stone.

Then she took her rifle and laid it upon a rock, thrust her pistol in her belt, and next took

from the locker her basket of lunch and bucket of milk.

Climbing up the steep bank she reached an embrasure and hesitated before the muzzle of a gun that had been long silent.

Then she deposited her dinner-basket and bucket; and, with her rifle ready, entered the embrasure and looked about her.

All was as still as death.

The place was grass-grown, several of the guns were dismounted, and others had settled well down into their embrasures.

A few shot and grape were piled up here and there, and more were scattered about.

The banks were overgrown with grass and weeds, the barracks in the rear were going to decay, and desolation rested upon all.

Becoming accustomed to the surroundings, Bessie went back for her lunch, and finding a sheltered spot, beneath a tree, she sat down and greatly enjoyed her lonely repast.

After it was finished she returned her basket and bucket to the boat, and after regarding the scenery from the fort, for half an hour, she set out on her tour of exploration.

The "Barracks" were half a dozen log-cabins, set back under the slope of the hill, with one apart, which had been the headquarters of the commandant.

The doors of the Barracks swung to and fro with creaking sound, fanned by the wind, and Bessie could well believe that the fort by night must be a most dismal spot indeed.

The cabin that stood apart was just in the way that she was going, and she was surprised to trace what she saw must be a slightly-worn path.

It led from one of the entrances to the cabin, and it seemed to wind on up the hillside in the rear.

She stopped at the door and glanced within, and as she did so her face paled and she uttered a slight cry of alarm.

The cabin held an occupant.

At a glance she saw the interior, for the door was wide open, and therein was a table, a cat, a bench, some few cooking utensils upon the broad hearth, whereon smoldered a fire, and upon the bed lay the form of a man.

He was evidently asleep, for he was fully dressed, a rifle stood by the head of the cot, and his hat was upon the bench near at hand.

Checking the first impulse to run away, Bessie remained, and her eyes were riveted upon the one who lay upon the cot-bed, calmly sleeping.

The form was that of a tall man of fine physique, and he was clad in sailor garb, only that he wore top-boots, and his hat on the bench was a sombrero.

Otherwise his garb partook of the sea, and about his waist was a leather belt.

The hair was somewhat long and iron-gray, while his beard reached nearly to his waist, and in it were many silver threads, that indicated his having passed the fifty-year mile-stone of life.

The features were well cut, refined and expressive, and he slumbered so peacefully, his hands crossed upon his breast, that Bessie feared that he was dead when she first beheld him.

Then, as she looked back to her from the past came that form and face, brought from the cells of memory—younger perhaps, as she recalled it, with no silver threads in hair or beard, but still the same noble countenance.

White as death she became for an instant, then against the door she leaned, as though for support; but back to her face came the blood, and her eyes fairly danced with joy as she stepped back out of sight and called in a sweet voice:

"Father!"

She heard a movement of the form, and again she called:

"Father!"

Then came a quick movement, and a footfall upon the floor, as the sleeper awoke and sat up on the side of his cot.

"Father!"

For the third time she called, and then, in a fervent, deep voice came the words:

"Great God! this is no dream."

A heavy step followed, the man appeared in the door, and with a cry of joy Bessie sprang toward him and was in her father's arms.

Her mother's hope had been realized—he was not dead.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WANDERER'S STORY.

FOR a long while neither the father or daughter spoke, and both seemed too happy in meeting again for words to break in upon their joy.

At last Bessie said:

"Father, how strange that I should find you here, in this somber old ruined fortress, and now that I find you, I know to whom I owe my safety from capture a few evenings since."

The man looked down as though at a loss to speak, but leading her to a seat upon a dismounted gun, he said:

"Yes, Bessie, my darling child, it is strange that you should find me here, strange that you should come to a spot which men shun as the

haunt of ghosts; but I am the only ghost that haunts the fort," and he smiled sadly.

"You are a substantial-looking ghost, father; but why are you here? Why have you not come home, for it has been days since you fired upon that man on the river."

"It was Ray Deming?" he asked, rather than asserted.

"It was; but did you recognize him at that distance, after the years since you saw him, for he was a youth then?"

"I have seen him since; only a couple of months ago," and an expression of pain passed over his face.

"But, father, why did you not hail me, then?"

"Did I kill him?" he asked, unheeding her question.

"No, father, but it was a narrow escape for him, and he would have died had I not rowed rapidly up to Bath with him."

"It was a long shot, and I meant to kill him; but let it go."

"But what is that man to you, Bessie?"

"Nothing in the world, father; but he was angry because I would not allow a number of men to attack a British cruiser that was anchored near our cove, and sought revenge upon me."

"I saw the cruiser, and you ran her out to sea, for I recognized you at the wheel."

"Yes, father."

"And I recognized my noble boy run out the day before on the deck of the lugger, which I hardly knew, she had changed so completely."

"Yes, father, brother Bert is now away, and I hoped to have met him this afternoon; but you have not asked yet about dear mother?"

The same look of pain as before crossed his handsome face, and his lips quivered; but he said nothing in reply.

"Why, father, do you not wish to know about poor mother, who has so longed for your return, and would never believe that you were dead?"

"Did not believe me dead, and yet has perjured herself in the sight of God and man!" he cried fiercely, springing to his feet, while across the mind of Bessie came the terrible thought that her father was mad.

"Father, what do you, what can you mean?" she cried pleadingly.

"Do you not know, girl?"

"I know that my mother has done no wrong, sir," said Bessie firmly.

"Done no wrong! Are you, too, lost to shame, that you see no wrong in a woman pledging herself as a wife to another man, when she believes her own husband to be alive?"

"Father! are you mad, to talk thus, of mother having done so great a wrong?"

"Do you mean to say that your mother is not the supposed wife of Squire Lynn?" he asked fiercely.

Bessie broke out into a merry laugh, while she said seriously, a moment after:

"Father, some one has basely deceived you about poor, dear mother. Why, she has not been up to the town, except to church, since you disappeared, and has been strong in the belief that you would some day return; and were you dead, she would marry no man, I feel confident."

The strong man quivered from head to foot, and from his lips came the words:

"God in Heaven, I thank Thee!"

Then he resumed his seat by the side of Bessie, and after a moment's effort to control himself, he said:

"Bessie, let me tell you why I have been absent so long—let me tell you all:

"The day I left home, I ran down to the sea to fish, and I caught an immense haul in a very short time. As I was about to come home, feeling that I would have to row up with the tide, for the wind had died away, I saw an armed schooner becalmed a league away.

"So I rowed to it, intending to sell my cargo, but, judge of my surprise and alarm, when getting near, I discovered her to be no English cruiser, but a pirate."

"Oh, father!"

"Yes, it was a pirate; but I showed no outward suspicion, hailed and told him I wished to sell him some fish, and was ordered alongside.

"They took my fish, and my skiff, for they needed another boat, and told me to go to work before the mast.

"There was no alternative and I obeyed, making up my mind I would pretend to rather like the outlaw service, and thus get a better chance to escape.

"You can imagine how I felt, knowing the anxiety you would all feel regarding me.

"But there I had to remain, a pirate in spite of myself, and under a most cruel master.

"He cruised southward, among the Indies, capturing, pillaging, burning and sinking merchant vessels, and running from cruisers at all times.

"Thus a year passed and I never had a chance to land, but at length he sailed to his rendezvous, an island in the Caribbean Sea, and there half a dozen of us were left in charge of his booty.

"But it was an almost barren island, and though he left us ample provisions, we had not the slightest chance of getting away.

"It was a year before he returned, and then he divided his booty, selected what he wished to take to port and sell, and left the balance for another visit.

"I begged him to take me with him, and he did so; but it was months before I could find a chance to escape, and then in the very moment of triumph I was captured and taken back to the vessel.

"The pirate again visiting his island retreat, I was left there once more and my companions were half a dozen wretched pirates.

"I thought, as the time drew near for another visit of the schooner, that I saw a chance of escape, and determined to sound my comrades upon doing so.

"They were divided, four against three of us; but we determined to make the attempt, and a fight followed.

"It could end but one way, my child, for I was desperate, and those who aided me were imbued with my spirit, and the weak triumphed over the stronger party.

"Then we tore down our little hut of logs, built of old spars, wreckage and boxes, and made a raft of it, for we had plenty of chain and rope cable.

"We cut up the boxes, that contained the pirate's booty, and after several days made a very respectable raft, with two masts, a bowsprit and a rudder.

"We put on provisions in a large box, and pushed off one day into the sea.

"Our craft was a slow one, but it was stanch, and we felt it would support us.

"For a week we steered about, passing through one storm, and my comrade—for the other had been killed in the affray with the four pirates, and both of us that remained slightly wounded, I forgot to say—comrade was lost overboard one night, and I was powerless to save him with the raft, as I could not manage it in the blow.

"Two days after I was picked up in the Atlantic by an American vessel, bound to India, and was well cared for.

"From India I shipped in a vessel bound to the Cape of Good Hope, and from there made my way to England.

"Then I shipped for Boston, going as seaman, and the very day I arrived in port was seized by a British Press-Gang, and carried off once more on a frigate bound for the Mediterranean.

"I told the captain my story, and he laughed at me, saying that it was a well-concocted lie to escape.

"This was a terrible blow, my child; but I stood up well under it, deserted as soon as I could, and again worked my way, by shipping on different ships, to Boston.

"There it was I met Ray Deming, and he recognized me, and I then recalled his face.

"Imagine my agony on being told by him that a mysterious murder had been committed about the time I left, and I was accused of it, and it was supposed I had run off to avoid being hanged."

"The villain!" said Bessie, as fiercely as her pretty lips could utter the words.

"But that was not all, for he told me that my wife had married Squire Lynn.

"Bessie, the blow was a fearful one, and I lay for weeks ill in a sailors' boarding-house, after telling him I should go to sea again.

"But a longing came over me to be near you once more, and remembering this old ruin, I came here.

"I brought ammunition with me, and my rifle got me game, the river provided fish, and I had ample provisions, while yonder hut has been my home.

"I dared not go up to Bath, and so walked to Portland when I needed supplies, and here was sorrowing my life away when you found me.

"Now, Bessie, you know my story."

"Father, there was a murder committed after you left, but no one ever suspected you of it, and Ray Deming told you what he did to keep you away, and be avenged on us all because I refused his love.

"My poor, poor father! how I pity you; but all sorrow is past now, and the bright future is before us, for you return with me in my skiff—Hark! was not that the flapping of a sail?"

As she spoke she ran to the embrasure and beheld a vessel coming up the river.

"The lugger! the lugger! Keep out of sight, father, and I will hail Bert and tell him to come ashore," and, as the lugger drew nearer she raised her voice and shouted:

"The Mermaid, ahoy! ahoy!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

REUNITED.

THE Mermaid Bessie had not inappropriately been termed a "flying machine," for she went along at all times as though running a race, or flying from a foe.

The little vessel had been a noted sailor, before her alterations, and was known along the coast, from the Penobscot to Montauk Point, as a craft that threw her slippers in the face of any skipper that had the temerity to try his speed with her.

She would sail with a fleet, some afternoon from Boston, Portsmouth or Portland, drop them

astern by the time a good offing was gained, and have her cargo out by the arrival of those destined to the same port.

The alterations which Bert Brandon had made in her were just what she needed, and he had been studying out the problem for some time, of adding to her speed in some way.

He could not have planned better, for her fleetness was increased so that it was phenomenal, while it seemed to make her more stanch and seaworthy than she was before, and that was saying a great deal.

After his running the gantlet of the two schooners, Bert Brandon stood out to sea for many leagues.

He had come to the conclusion that his Mermaid Bessie was indeed a marvel, for he well knew the speed of the Vicious, and in the trial with her he had seen that the Bother had walked away from the smaller schooner as fast as he did from both of them.

Anxious to avoid meeting any vessel that might cut him off from the Kennebec, he held out to sea until twenty leagues were between him and the land.

Then he shaped his course north by east, and held it until he was opposite to the mouth of the Kennebec, when he stood in for it.

Had Bessie looked a little more to the northward when fishing she might have seen a small sail upon the waters, heading for the river.

But she did not expect the lugger from that direction, and merely casually scanned the horizon.

As he ran toward the river Bert Brandon cracked on all sail, for he was anxious to get up to the town before dark and return home for the night.

So the Mermaid went flying into the river, crowded from deck to truck with canvas, and looking grandly beautiful as she sped along between the picturesque banks of the Kennebec.

As she was sweeping up toward the fort, her sails making the sound as of thousands of rushing wings between the bold shores, there suddenly was heard a hail.

All started, and almost instantly it was repeated:

"The Mermaid Bessie ahoy!"

"That is my sister's voice, for I would know it among a thousand.

"Stand by all to lay to," and Bert Brandon responded in his clear tones:

"Ahoy! Miss Brandon ahoy!"

Then his eyes fell upon the maiden as she sprang upon the rampart in bold relief.

"Come out in your skiff, sis, and I will pick you up," shouted Bert, while he muttered:

"What in all creation is she doing there, I wonder?"

"No, brother, you bring the lugger to and come ashore, for I want you," came the answer.

Anxious as to the cause, Bert Brandon rounded to and ordered the skiff over the side.

Into it he sprang and was quickly ashore.

"What is it, Bessie?" he asked with anxiety, as she met him at the shore.

"Brother, father is not dead," she said, earnestly.

"Thank God! but—"

"Come with me, for I have found him."

She led him up the hill, through an embrasure, and father and son again met.

It was a touching meeting, for they grasped each other's hands and stood thus in silence a moment, and then Bert said, while his voice quivered:

"Thank God you have come back to us, father."

"Ah, my son, I would never have gone, had it been possible to prevent it; but you must hear my story to-night, when I tell all to your mother."

"Now let us go, father, and what a surprise it will be for Potomac and Kennebec! don't say a word, father, nor look up, until you board the lugger."

They went down the shore and Bessie's skiff was taken in tow, while they went off in the one belonging to the lugger.

As the returned wanderer sprang upon the deck, Potomac gave a shout of delight, while Kennebec uttered a regular war-whoop of pleasure.

Then the negro grabbed one hand, and Kennebec the other, the former executing a regular double-shuffle of delight, while he said:

"De Lord am a Angil o' Goodness ter let yer come back to us all, ole massa. Gor' bress your soul, sah!"

"Kennebec heap glad big sea chief come back; miss white brother heap."

The Napier boys had known Captain Brandon, for so he was called, in the past, and also gave him a welcome, while Imp grasped his hand also with a word of greeting.

"Well, my friends, you give me such a cordial welcome, you do not observe the lugger is drifting ashore," said Captain Brandon, and they all hastily sprang to their posts once more, the lugger was gotten upon her way, and drove on up the river with wind and tide.

"Bessie, I'll drop you as we go by, and you must break the news gently to mother, and father will come down from the town with me, after we have made fast to the dock, for Nick

will see to getting the cargo out, until I return to-morrow," said Bert.

And so, as they neared The Nook, Bessie went into the skiff, which had been hauled alongside, and without stopping she was cast adrift, and seizing her oars rowed shoreward, while Mrs. Brandon stood on the cliff waving to her son, and little dreaming that hiding in the cabin, gazing at her through the deadlight, was her husband.

As the lugger swept on out of sight, Bessie reached the cliff, where her mother awaited her, and said:

"I have been very anxious about you all day, my child; but I am repaid, by seeing that you brought your brother back safely, though I noticed that the lugger has been again under fire."

"Why, mother, I did not observe it, I assure you; but now you speak of it, I did see the sails had been cut through, and the bulwark pierced in two places; the fact is, mother, I was too happy to notice anything."

"And I am happy, too, to see the noble boy home again."

"Yes, mother, but this has been the happiest day of my life, for I have made a great discovery."

"Why, Bessie, what do you mean?"

"I was successful in getting some game, and a superb catch of fish, and they will make an elegant supper, for brother is to bring company home with him, a gentleman I found at the fort, living a life of exile, because he had been carried off by pirates, and upon returning was told by a wicked wretch that his wife had married Squire Lynn, of the Cabin and Forecastle Inn, and so he—"

"My child, you have found your father!"

"I knew that he was not dead!"

"Father in Heaven, I thank thee!"

And the poor woman quivered with joy and excitement.

"Yes, mother, I found father at the old fort, and he is to return home with Brother Bert; so we must have a splendid supper for them, and, mother, you won't have time to laugh or to cry, only to help fix up to receive them."

And, fearing that her mother would break down, Bessie bustled about to make preparations, and Mrs. Brandon began to aid her, though tears of joy trickled down her face as she worked.

As darkness fell, Bessie ran out to light the beacon, and she caught sight of a little sail dashing into the basin.

At the landing she met her brother and father, and the latter went on alone to the cabin, Bert and Bessie following, and, reunited as they were, no four happier beings lived that night than those who dwelt there in the little cabin of the glen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN DARKNESS AND STORM.

WHEN Bert Brandon returned to the town the next morning he was met upon all sides by congratulations upon his father's return, and the fact that he had a second time run the gantlet into Boston Harbor.

He was surprised to find, however, that no effort had been made to discharge the cargo other than a small quantity, for the reader may remember that four-fifths of it had been consigned to one person—a merchant in Bath.

This party had said the evening before, when told by Nick Napier that they had brought a large quantity of freight for him, that he had ordered nothing and was expecting nothing, so would not receive it.

Under such circumstances the mate had kept it on board to await the coming of Bert Brandon.

Just as he arrived the stage rolled into Bath with the mail, and in it was a letter addressed to

"SKIPPER BERT BRANDON,

OF

"The Lugger MERMAID BESSIE,

"Bath,"

"Commonwealth of Mass.

"Post-haste."

This letter was from the shipper in Boston, saying that there had been a mistake, and the freight should have gone to a man of the same name in Portsmouth, and to bring the cargo back at once and freight would be paid on it.

Bert Brandon was provoked, for he had, after receiving the papers left for him by Lieutenant Nelson, and knowing all, determined not to run the gantlet any more, but to go to Boston, thank his British friends for their kindness, and accepting the pardon, decline the commission offered him, and request permission to trade unmolested along the coast in his lugger.

This freight matter, however, would necessitate his going at once back, and carrying a cargo, when he had not intended doing so until he had the proper authority.

"Well, lads, we must get at once to sea again, and, under existing circumstances, I will neither carry passengers, or freight, other than what we are compelled to take back, and I shall, I suppose, have to run the gantlet to get in with it, but will make all plain after I do so.

The torn sails were patched, the shot-marks repaired, and the lugger left the town in the afternoon upon her return, stopping off the cove for Bert Brandon, who had returned home to explain matters.

"I think you do wisely, my son, to carry no passengers or freight, after what has been done for you, as you ran in once since the papers were made out.

"And you can readily explain matters, I think, when you return: but do you think it wise to run in as before?" said Captain Brandon.

"Yes, father, for if my vessel is brought to, say by the schooner, she will be held until all papers are looked into, and the freight I carry should be returned at once.

"I will slip in by the way of Shirley Gut, as before, run right in alongside of the wharf, and begin to discharge the cargo at night, when in the morning I will report to Lieutenant Nelson and explain all to him, for he is a splendid fellow, after all."

"I think it will be best, after all, for as you say, the cargo may be detained at the mercy of officials for days and days.

"Well, when you get your permit to run as a coaster, you will be all right, while I shall devote myself to the care of the house," and all arose to go out to the cliff, while Bessie was to row her brother out to the lugger when it came in sight.

At last the Mermaid bore in sight, farewells were said, and Bessie soon rowed Bert alongside, and on her way the fleet craft went, and the run to Cape Ann was made without adventure.

It was noon when Cape Ann was sighted, and Bert Brandon said, as he gazed at the heavens:

"Nick, we are going to have a black night of it, the very thing for our run in, for the guard-boats will have all they can do to look after themselves if this weather breaks after night-fall, as it now threatens."

"You will not try the lights again, sir?"

"No, indeed, for I guess they discovered that little ruse of ours, and have changed the signals.

"I shall go by the way of Shirley Gut, and we will have plenty of water with this driving east wind, you may be sure."

"But can you follow the channel in the darkness and storm?"

"I shall put her under just enough canvas to work her, and keep two men throwing the lead, and do not doubt but that I can make it."

"If we get it as it now looks, a kerchief forward will run her in as fast as we wish to go," Nick Napier said.

"We shall get all we want, and it will be black as Potomac's face, you may be certain, so get all in ship-shape, have the anchors ready to drop at short cable if necessary, and see that the lugger is in a condition to help us all she can."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the young mate set to work to obey orders, while the Mermaid Bessie, under simply reefed mainsail and jib, held on her way, for Bert Brandon did not wish to get near enough to be seen before nightfall.

As he had predicted, it came on to storm toward sunset, a severe easterly wind setting in.

The seas became black, and the waves ran very high, while the wind blew with tremendous fury.

The Boston Light was left on the port beam, as the lugger was headed for the channel between Shirley Point and Deer Island, and Bert Brandon himself was in the foretop, glass in hand, trying to find the way in, for there was no beacon there to guide him.

Kennebec held the helm, as he most thoroughly understood the working of the lugger, and Nick Napier stood on the starboard bow with his lead-line, while Van was to port also with a lead-line.

Potomac stood by the main sheet, and Imp was at hand to look after the jib sheet, for under these sails only the Mermaid was driving along on her perilous course, and these, under the pressure of the storm, were all that she needed.

The wind was nearly aft, and the main-boom was drawn up well by the topping-lift, for the lugger rolled heavily in the quartering sea that was running.

"Port your helm!" came from aloft in Bert Brandon's deep voice, and Kennebec obeyed in silence, for he never replied to an order, as is the wont of seamen to repeat it, that there may be a certainty that it is understood.

"Starboard a little!"

And the order was obeyed.

"Steady as you are!"

"Port hard! steady! Now we are in the channel, so lower away the mainsail, for the jib will carry her through," called down Bert Brandon.

The main sheet was instantly hauled inboard and lowered, Kennebec stood with his side to the bow, depending wholly upon the skipper, and kept the tiller firmly in hand, ready to obey the slightest orders, and all others were at their posts.

From his position aloft the young captain could better find his way, and he kept his eyes straining into the darkness about him.

"Heave the lead!" he called down, and in-

stantly Nick Napier cast his line and called out sharply:

"Six fathoms!"

"Four fathoms!" came from Van Napier on the port bow.

"Port helm! quick!" cried the skipper, and the lugger fell off from the danger.

"Five fathoms!" came from starboard.

"Five fathoms!" from port.

"Steady as you are!" from aloft.

And so on through the darkness and storm, until there was heard forward in chorus:

"Eight feet and a half!"

"Steady as you are!" from aloft.

"All through in safety!" the next moment was heard in the voice of Bert Brandon, and soon the lugger was headed away for the town.

With bare poles, almost, she was not seen until almost up to the wharf, and then a guard-boat barely escaped being run down by her in the darkness and storm, for the harbor was rough, and the waves breaking over the barge, the lantern had been housed forward.

Instantly a voice cried:

"It's the Gantlet-Runner!"

Then came a chorus of voices, a stern order for silence, and next:

"Send up the alarm rockets!"

The lugger had swept on out of hearing, but in her wake danced the guard-boat, while up into the air soared the fiery serpents, telling that the daring Gantlet-Runner had returned, and again was safe in Boston Harbor.

Unheeding the alarm, Bert Brandon went to the wharf, made fast, furled his sails, and had begun to discharge his cargo beneath a shed, when suddenly up came a score of soldiers, and Major Shackelford was at their head, and he instantly sprang upon the deck of the lugger, his sword in hand.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TELL-TALE CARGO.

"WHERE is the skipper of this craft?" sternly said Major Shackelford, as he sprang upon the deck, while his men ranged themselves along the wharf, their muskets ready for use.

"He is in the cabin, sir, arranging his papers," replied Nick Napier.

"Is this the craft known as the Gantlet-Runner?"

"It is the Mermaid Bessie, sir."

"The same; her skipper's name is Bert Brandon?"

"Who wishes me?" and the young skipper stepped out of the cabin.

"You are my prisoner, sir, and resistance will cost you and your men death at once."

"I see no reason, sir, to resist a king's officer, having broken no law," was the calm reply.

"That we will soon discover, and for your sake I hope you speak the truth, for we have met before, Sir Skipper, and I admired your pluck immensely."

"Of what am I accused, Major Shackelford, for I recognize you now, as commander of the governor's guard," calmly said Bert Brandon.

"You are accused of piracy, sir."

"Piracy! Good God! Who dares accuse me of crime?" and Bert's voice rung with indignant anger.

"You will have a chance to face your accusers, sir, without a doubt; but now it is my duty to make prisoners of you and your crew."

"How many are you in all?"

"Five, sir, in all."

"And all are here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Iron those five men," and the major turned to a sergeant, who briskly stepped forward.

"One is a boy, sir; will you iron him?"

"Yes, my orders are to put all on board in irons, and carry you off to the town jail."

"This is indeed hard, sir; why not take me and let my crew go?"

"All are guilty if one is."

"I have a pardon in my pocket from the governor, and—"

"That was for your remarkable and desperate gantlet-running; but the charge now is that you are a pirate, and you will have to prove that you are not, if you can."

"I think I can, sir."

"If you are not hanged first, and tried afterward, for these are days, young sir, when British officers have to be less particular than formerly."

"Are you ready?"

"I am, sir, and my crew are also; but will you not leave some one to guard my vessel?"

"I am to hold her, sir, and my sergeant will take you to prison," and Bert Brandon and his crew were ironed and marched away under a guard of a dozen soldiers, while as many more remained with the vessel, Major Shackelford making himself comfortable in the cozy cabin.

As the dawn began to break the storm broke away, and a number of officials came down to the wharf, and the unloading of the lugger was completed, when the boxes were broken open, examined and stamped for some reason.

Then followed a thorough search of the vessel, and a guard of soldiers was put along the wharf to keep back the crowd, for the rumor had spread that the famous Gantlet-Runner had been taken, and was found to be a pirate, under

guise of an honest coaster, while her crew had been sent to jail.

The major had just returned from his breakfast, and was enjoying a cigar as he paced to and fro on the deck of the lugger, when a carriage rolled up to the wharf and a soldier came forward and said:

"The Lady Lulu Langdon and Miss Wyndom desire to pass through the lines."

The major at once went forward, for he was very much in love with Madge Wyndom, and assisting the ladies to alight from the carriage, invited them on board the lugger.

"This is the famous Gantlet-Runner, young ladies, and, though not a sailor, I must say she is a beauty."

"When did she come in, Major Shackelford?" asked Lady Lulu.

"Last night, in the midst of that terrific storm, and she ran in between Shirley Point and Deer Island, too; but that is just like her young skipper, and he almost reached the wharf before he was discovered."

"I learn that Captain Brandon is accused of piracy."

"Yes, Miss Wyndom, we had information brought us yesterday that the skipper was in league with a pirate, and took cargoes of booty aboard at certain secret points along the coast, and then brought it into port and disposed of it to a Jew."

"It is false," said Lady Lulu, indignantly.

"I half believed so, Lady Lulu, but the cargo has been discharged and examined, and it certainly appears as though it was the booty of half a hundred ships, for there are silks, satins, clothing, laces, jewelry and odds and ends of all descriptions that have the flavor of a Jewish money-lender's shop."

Lady Lulu turned pale and glanced at Madge, but she asked:

"And where did he get this remarkable cargo?"

"From a pirate schooner somewhere on the coast," was the reply.

"I think he is falsely accused, Major Delafield," said Lady Lulu.

"And so do I," responded Madge.

"I sincerely hope so; but the proof seems strong against him, young ladies."

"Who is his accuser?"

"I do not know; but we received notice from a reliable source that he was not trading honestly, but running in with pirate booty, and so I was to watch for the coming of the vessel and seize her."

"He ran the gantlet last night, in his most clever way, and would have gotten in and unloaded his cargo, and escaped to sea again, but for the fact that he nearly ran down a guard-boat, the officer of which recognized the lugger and sent up the alarm."

"And he and his men are in prison now?"

"Yes, Lady Lulu."

"Confined in separate cells?"

"Such were the orders to place them."

"They have had no chance to communicate since you arrested them?"

"None."

"Madge?"

"Well, Lulu?"

"If Major Shackelford will give us permission to visit the prisoners, will you accompany me?"

"Certainly, Lulu; but what good will it do?"

"I believe that Captain Brandon is not guilty, and I wish to take down the reports of each one of the prisoners and see how they agree, while we can get at some facts, perhaps, that may aid us."

"He saved me from death, and I will not see him hanged without an effort to save him."

"I will accompany you, with your permission, Lady Lulu."

"With pleasure," and the three drove away to the prison.

Arriving there the commandant readily admitted the major and his fair visitors, and Imp was the first one visited.

"My boy, when did you leave the Kennebec?" asked Lady Lulu, taking upon herself the task of interlocutor.

"Three days ago, lady."

"What cargo did you bring from there?"

"Some freight we carried to Bath by mistake, for it was shipped to a merchant there, but did not belong to him."

"And you brought it back?"

"Yes, lady, Cap'n Bert got a letter to bring it back, and he did so."

"Why did he not run boldly into port, as he carried a pardon for his past acts?"

"I don't know, lady, but he could tell you."

Then the party visited the cell of Van Napier, and the fine-looking young sailor arose and saluted with marked politeness, while Lady Lulu received the same answers to her questions.

Next Nick Napier was sought, and his replies were about the same, while he replied, when asked why Bert Brandon had not come boldly into port:

"Captain Brandon received a letter stating that the freight was for a man of the same name in Newport, I believe, and to return it with all haste."

"He supposed, if he came in by day, he would be halted by the schooner, or war-ships,

and the cargo be detained a week, as is the case with American cargoes, and so he determined to run in and discharge it by night, and then seek the admiral and report his acts."

"This seems plausible, Lady Lulu, for if the lugger had been overhauled by the vessels-of-war, it might have been a week, or more, before she would have been given a permit to discharge it," said Major Shackelford.

"Thanking the mate they went to Potomac's cell, and his story agreed with the others."

"You did not see a vessel on your way from the Kennebec?" asked Lady Lulu.

"No indeed, miss, the Britishers done skeert Yankee vessels off de seas, fearin' dey would git dar sailor mans taken."

"And where did you take in the cargo you brought here with you?"

"Right here in Bosting, Missy Leddy."

"And were you to take back a cargo with you?"

"Yes, missy, if Massa Bert git one quick, for he were anxious to git home, as his father done be resurrected from de dead, fer Missy Bessie find him one day."

Both Lady Lulu and Madge remembered having heard from Bessie how her father had disappeared, and, surprised at his return, they asked Potomac and learned from him the full story of Captain Brandon's long wanderings.

Then they sought Kennebec, and the Indian told them in his abrupt way just what the others had said.

"If this is a story, it is well told," said Major Shackelford, and he added:

"Now to visit the handsome young skipper," and they were taken to the cell in which Bert Brandon was confined.

CHAPTER XL.

A CONSPIRACY.

BERT BRANDON was pacing his cell, when the door was thrown open and the visitors admitted.

He stopped where the light from the window fell full upon him, and he certainly looked strikingly handsome, while his tall, elegant form was commanding and his mien dignified and courteous.

His face flushed when he saw who his visitors were, and reddened more as Lady Lulu advanced and held out her hand while she said:

"Captain Brandon, I am glad to meet you again, though sorry to see you here."

"Permit me to present you to my cousin, Miss Wyndom, and our friend, Major Shackelford."

Bert Brandon bowed with courtly grace, and responded:

"It is kind of you, Lady Lulu, to visit me here, and I feel honored."

"Major Shackelford I have had the pleasure of meeting before, and wish to thank him for his manly conduct toward me on a former occasion."

"By Jove! my dear fellow, yours was the manly conduct, if you refer to our meeting up the river that night, and I only am sorry you are here, under the charge filed against you."

"The charge is utterly false, sir, as can be proven, if I am allowed time to prove it so," was the indignant response.

"Will you tell us the circumstances under which you returned to port, Captain Brandon?" asked Lady Lulu.

"With pleasure, lady," and the young sailor told the story in his frank way, while he added:

"Not wishing to detain the cargo, I determined to risk running in, and then seek Lieutenant Nelson, tell him how much I thanked him for his kindness, and, while accepting my pardon with pleasure, and deeply grateful for it, decline the honor of a commission in the king's service."

"And why decline it, may I ask?" said Lady Lulu.

"To be honest, Lady Lulu, I am an American, my feelings, sympathies and all are with my fellow-colonists, and as such I feel how we are looked upon and—pardon me—tyrannized over by our rulers, for though of our own flesh and blood, they are nothing more."

"I hope that there may be no war between the colonies and the mother country, but should there be, I would not prove a traitor to the land of my birth, and so could not hold a king's commission."

"I honor you for your frankness, Captain Brandon," said Madge, earnestly, while Lady Lulu remarked:

"Assuredly do I, also."

"Egad, so do I, for I admit you have cause in the colonies to grumble, and many of my brother officers are too bitter—cruel, in fact—in their dealings with a people whom I have found to be a noble race; but, as a king's officer, I have but to obey my orders, though often I detest the service devolving upon me."

"You are a plucky fellow, Brandon, and should war come, you will be a leader among your people, and not a follower."

"Your sentiments as a British officer, Major Shackelford, I respect, sir, and should we be foes openly, I can only respect you in my heart as I know you to be, and regard you with friend-

ship, provided I am not hanged as a pirate," he added, with a smile.

"We must save you, Brandon," said the major, while Lady Lulu asked:

"Have you no suspicion that this charge may be a conspiracy against you, Captain Brandon—the act of some enemy?"

Bert Brandon started, for across his mind came a thought that there was something in the suggestion.

The others saw that the remark had given him food for thought, and Major Shackelford said quickly:

"Yes, the Lady Lulu may be right, some enemy may be at the bottom of this."

"Major Shackelford, I did not suspect I had one who would be so unmanly as to be a secret foe; but I believe, now that Lady Lulu suggests it, that I can trace this arrest to one person; in fact, I had forgotten certain suspicious circumstances which are now recalled."

"Permit me to aid you, Brandon, in any way that I can."

"Thank you, sir, and I will ask your kind offices in the matter, if you will be good enough to inform me if one Brewster Talbot is not my accuser."

"He came down from the Kennebec with me on the last run, and I had good reason to doubt him, as you may see by this note, which I had forgotten wholly," and he took from his pocket the slip of paper found by Imp on the lugger.

"Here also is the letter I received, ordering the cargo back to Boston, and I think I can now understand fully that it was a plot to hang me as a pirate, or at least an ally."

The note was first read, Major Shackelford reading it aloud:

"Why, this alone will clear you, Brandon," said the major, eagerly.

"Do you know what the prize was to be for this man's treachery, Captain Brandon?" asked Lady Lulu.

The sailor's face flushed as he replied:

"I can guess, Lady Lulu; but in clearing myself, if I can, by showing that I am the victim of a conspiracy, there is but one only must suffer, and that one Brewster Talbot, for I would not have harm befall his ally."

"It is a woman?" and Madge asserted it, rather than asked it.

"Yes, Miss Wyndom."

"Read the letter, please, Major Shackelford," said Lady Lulu.

It was a letter purporting to come from the shipper of the goods in the lugger, telling him there was a mistake, as they were not intended for Bath, and to return them in all haste to Boston.

The major asked:

"Do you know the firm here named, Brandon?"

"No more than that the agent came, bargained for the freight to go and put it aboard, sir."

"Well, I am convinced that you are the victim of some designing foe, and I will so report to the governor, when I am relieved from duty."

"Permit me to have the letter and note, Captain Brandon, and I will drive at once to Governor Gage and place the matter before him," said Lady Lulu.

"Well said, Lady Lulu, and you will win."

"The governor will capitulate the moment that you and Miss Wyndom cross the threshold," cried Major Shackelford.

"But there is another thing to be done, and that is to find this man signing himself, 'B. T.'"

"Yes, I will send at once and have him arrested, for it will do no harm, and he certainly is guilty."

"You will find him at the John Bull Inn, Major Shackelford, and his name is Brewster Talbot."

The party then took their leave, and Bert Brandon was again alone, and he murmured sadly:

"She will save me from the hangman, and break my heart herself, for I can never hope to win her love; no, never!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

GOVERNOR GAGE was seated in his official reception-room in his elegant home on North Square, and with him were several officers in uniform, making their reports to him, when a liveried servant announced that two ladies desired to see him.

"Some of these colonists, eh, Williams, to get me to right some wrong done by my red-coats?" asked the governor, adding:

"I am too busy to see any one."

"They are Lady Lulu Langdon, sir, and the honorable secretary's daughter," said an orderly, seeing that the servant did not know them, for he was a new man.

"Ah! ask them in at once."

A moment after Lady Lulu and Madge entered, and the governor advanced in his courtly way to receive them, remarking gallantly:

"This is an honor my headquarters is not often allowed, and I feel assured it is not merely to inquire after my health that you are come."

"We have come to ask a favor of you, Governor Gage," said Madge.

"And one which, when you know the circumstances, you will grant, I feel assured," added Lady Lulu in her sweet way.

"You have but to command, and I obey," was the gallant remark.

Thus encouraged Lady Lulu told her story, of her being rescued, which the governor knew, however, of all that had happened since, the visit to The Nook in the Bother, and ended by showing the letters, and asking for the release of Bert Brandon.

The governor listened most attentively, and said:

"Young ladies, I gave a pardon to this daring young Yankee skipper, for I felt that he merited it, and the admiral wished to commission him, and one was made out for him; but you say this he declines?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry, for I would like to have a few just such Americans as he has proven himself enter the service; but if he has feelings to the contrary, so be it."

"As to this charge of piracy against him, I think it is a conspiracy, from these letters and all you tell me, so I will let you offer him his freedom if he gives his *parole of honor* to you, Lady Lulu, not to leave the town until this affair is cleared up."

"Tell him to set about at once clearing himself of the charge, and when he has done so, he shall be a free man, and the guilty one shall suffer."

Thanking the governor most warmly, Lady Lulu received the official document, releasing Bert Brandon from prison, and in a few moments after they were again at the jail, and the young skipper was brought before them.

"Captain Brandon, if you will give me your parole not to leave the town or harbor without the sanction of Governor Gage, I will see that you are set free at once, so that you can obtain proofs of your innocence of this charge."

"If you find your enemies, you are at liberty, Governor Gage says, to arrest them, and then you are to report to Major Shackelford, for he is unable to discover the man whose name is signed to the note, while there is no such firm as the one purporting to have written that letter."

"Do you give me your parole, Captain Brandon?"

"Willingly, Lady Lulu, and I shall quickly prove to you that I am innocent of any wrongdoing," and Bert Brandon asked:

"Does this extend to my crew also?"

"Certainly."

Five minutes after Bert Brandon and his crew were at the Harpoon Inn, and the young skipper had given them certain instructions, after which all departed upon some secret mission.

Bert Brandon awaited their return, and after hearing what they had to report, left the inn and wended his way to an up-town street, among the residences, and knocked at the door of a comfortable-looking house.

A servant appeared, and upon asking to see Miss Hettie Lynn, he was shown into the parlor.

"Who shall I say, sir?"

"Mr. Brewster Talbot," was the reply.

A moment after Hettie swept into the room, looking very beautiful.

She started at seeing Bert Brandon, and her face turned pale; but recovering herself she said:

"Why, I was told another name than yours, and I certainly did not expect to see you."

"No, Miss Lynn, you believed me in prison, and fearing you would not see me, I sent the name of your fellow-conspirator," was the stern reply.

"I do not understand you, Bert Brandon."

"I shall endeavor to make myself fully understood, Miss Lynn, and I will request your deep attention."

"I was arrested last night, as a pirate, and with my crew were taken to prison."

"How I was released it matters not to you; but you see that I am free, and I have come to offer you certain terms."

"I do not understand you, sir," she said, with flashing eyes.

"You will before I conclude what I have to say."

"The day of our conversation in the arbor in the pines, at your house, there was an eaves-dropper, Brewster Talbot, who heard all that was said."

"Then, when I departed, you and he were overheard in a plot to destroy me."

"The one who overheard you was asleep in the thicket, and our voices awoke him from his half-drunken slumber, and he heard all that was said between you and Talbot."

"When I was away he attempted to kidnap my sister, was wounded, and but for Bessie taking him to his home, he would have died."

"I visited him when last in port, and he told me what he had overheard you and Talbot plot against me; he told me this to curry favor with me after his act toward Bessie."

"It was Ray Deming, Hettie."

"I would not believe him under oath."

"Nor I, unless facts substantiated what he said, as they do in this case."

"On the way into port, Brewster Talbot sought to aid me, as he said, intending to wreck my lugger on the sands."

"Failing in this he, with your money, began a plot against me."

"He went to an old Jew here, bought a vast quantity of trash and bogus jewelry, boxed it up and, putting the name of a Bath merchant upon the boxes, shipped it by my vessel."

"There the merchant refused to receive it, and a letter, sent by stage, told me that it was for a man of the same name at another port, and to return it at once."

"I did so; but Brewster Talbot had reported that I was a pirate, on my going out, and the schooner-of-war Vicious was signaled to stop me."

"Failing in this, he made a statement to the governor, that I was allied with a coast pirate, received his booty outside, and ran into port with it and sold it."

"Under this charge, carried out by my running the gantlet in and out, I was arrested on my return."

"Now I have discovered, through my faithful crew, that he paid out eleven hundred dollars of your money for a cargo of worthless trash, so to speak, calling it private booty, and shipped it in the name of a firm that does not exist, to catch me with it on board my vessel."

"But for friends here, I would have been hanged almost without trial, and he would have gained you, the prize for which he worked, according to what Ray Deming overheard, and which the note he handed to you on the lugger, and which you, as you supposed, threw into the sea, and did not observe that the wind blew it on board again, as you *threw it to windward*."

"The letter he wrote in the name of this fictitious firm, the note I refer to, the Jew of whom he bought the *pirate goods*, are all in evidence against you, as well as Ray Deming who overheard your plot."

"Now, Hettie, I have kept your name out of it all, and I wish to say this to you, that Ray Deming will, not speak of what he overheard, and he leaves Bath as soon as he is well enough, never to return, under penalty of being known as attempting to kidnap Bessie."

"Again, I will not refer to your part in the matter, for it would break your dear old father's heart, so I say to you, that you can go home to-day, by stage, and remain as before, no one knowing your secret, if you will do so, upon one condition."

"Name it," she said hoarsely.

"That you tell me where Brewster Talbot is?"

"He is at the John Bull Inn."

"He is not there, though his room is there; but he knows that I am out of prison, and he has sought a hiding-place, and *you know where it is*."

"Why do you say what is not true, Bert Brandon?"

"It is true, for Imp heard him say to you:

"If this goes wrong and we have to hide, go at once to—' more he could not hear, but he has gone where he told you to go."

"I do not remember the address."

"Very well, Hettie, I shall not suffer from any false idea of gallantry toward a woman who plotted to have me hanged as a pirate, and you will have to go to prison."

"Mercy, oh, mercy!" cried the girl, dropping upon her knees before the young sailor and clasping her hands pleadingly.

"You had no mercy for me, Hettie, for those who are dear to me, and would have seen me hang as a pirate, because I did not love you."

"Now, you can give Brewster Talbot up, or I will take you to prison, for I hold a commission as a king's officer, and though I intend to resign it to-day, being an American, I shall do one good service under its protection and arrest you."

"Mercy! oh, mercy!" moaned the wretched girl.

"Either you go, or Brewster Talbot, so which shall it be?"

"The stage leaves at six o'clock?" she said, eagerly.

"Yes."

"And I can go, if I tell?"

"Yes."

"And you will not betray me?"

"No."

"Not to a soul?"

"I will, on the contrary, do all I can to protect you."

"But will not Brewster Talbot?"

"No, for I shall place the whole charge of guilt upon him, and use what influence I may have to have him sent in an India, bound vessel before the mast, with the penalty of death, if he returns to America."

"You will find him here."

"He came to me at noon, and said you were free, and he was going to hide until he knew what the result would be," and she handed to the young sailor a slip of paper upon which was written an address.

"Thank you, Hettie, and do not leave this house until time to take the stage, for there will be one to watch your movements, and arrest you, should you do so."

"Go home to-night, and let all be as it was

before, for though we may not be friends, at heart, others shall not know it."

"Good-by, Hettie, and please send word to The Nook that I am out of my trouble, for the papers will soon get the news of my arrest," and Bert Brandon left the house, while the wretched girl threw herself prone upon the floor in a torrent of bitter weeping.

CHAPTER XLII.

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

BREWSTER TALBOT was in hiding, and the place he had sought was at the home of an old friend, who had been a schoolmate years before, and, like himself had gone to the bad.

Caught cheating one night at cards, his friend had been shot by his victim, and his arm, shattered by the bullet, had to be amputated.

Since then he had changed his ways and dwelt with his mother, who lived in a little cottage on the harbor shores.

Here Brewster Talbot had gone to remain in hiding, knowing his friend would give him a shelter, at the same time keep him posted as to all that was going on.

It was the direction how to find this cottage that Hettie Lynn had given Bert Brandon upon a slip of paper.

Having obtained the address, and frightened the girl into not warning Talbot, Bert Brandon had gone to the inn again and called his crew to meet him there.

"Boys, I wish you to be here at eight o'clock to-night, for I have a little expedition to make; in which I need your aid."

"You, Nick, I wish to keep an eye upon the stage from Portland, when it leaves, and let me know if any one departs in it for Bath, and who they are."

Then Bert Brandon told Van Napier and Imp to keep their eyes on the Jew junk-dealer, who had sold the goods to Brewster Talbot, and have him come with them to the inn after dark.

"You, Potomac and Kennebec, come with me," and Bert Brandon left the inn and wended his way to the wharf.

There a shore boat was secured and the negro and Indian, taking the oars, rowed their master out to the schooner-of-war Bother.

Getting permission to go alongside, the skipper was soon in the cabin, where he was greeted by Lieutenant Nelson most cordially, who said:

"My dear Brandon, I have just returned from a search for you, as I learned of your arrest, and also that Lady Lulu and Miss Wyndom got you free under parole, to hunt up your accusers."

"What does it all mean?"

"Simply, Lieutenant Nelson, that I have been the victim of an enemy's hatred; but I have run him to earth, and will capture him to-night."

"I have come to ask you to go with me to the admiral, sir, if you will kindly do so, that I may return my commission, as I cannot, in justice to myself, accept the honor conferred upon me."

"You will not reconsider your determination, Brandon?"

"No, Lieutenant Nelson, my mind is made up."

"Then I will go with you, of course, though I regret such determination on your part."

"It is best, sir."

"And what is to be done with this base fellow who so nearly got your head into the hangman's noose?"

"For the sake of his people at home, sir, I would wish that he was not imprisoned, but that the admiral could order him sent away as seaman, on the corvette that sails for India to-morrow, and threaten him with the death-penalty should he return."

"He will get off easy at that."

"I shall feel content, sir."

"Very well, we will see the admiral, and then I will order a crew to arrest your man."

"Thank you, sir, but I will arrest him and deliver him on board the corvette to-night."

"That will do just as well; but what will you do then?"

"Ask permission of the governor to run as a trader, sir, between Boston and the Kennebec."

"Well, you know best, Brandon, and there will be no doubt about your getting the permit; but I did hope to have you as an officer on the Bother."

"You are very kind, sir, but it seems to me that an American is out of place upon the quarter-deck of a British vessel," and without reply Neal Nelson led the way from the cabin and soon after they boarded the flagship, where officers and men showed great curiosity to see the daring Gantlet-Runner, as Bert Brandon was now called.

The old admiral received him with cordiality, and said bluntly:

"You better accept the commission, my young Yankee friend, as it will save you from being hanged some day as a rebel, for it has got to come to blows yet between England and her colonies."

"With that belief, sir, I feel I could not be a king's officer," was the frank reply.

"Well, you will keep our whole fleet busy, if you enter the rebel service, if what you have done in the past is any guarantee of what you can do."

"Egad, sir, I never saw or heard of bolder work, and I am sorry to lose you as a king's officer, and drink your health with pleasure," and the admiral ordered wine for his visitors.

Returning to the shore, very much pleased with his visit, Bert Brandon went to the inn, and found his crew awaiting him.

"Well, Nick?"

"Miss Hettie Lynn was the only one I saw take the stage for Bath, Captain Bert."

"Did she see you?"

"No, sir, I kept out of sight, as you requested I should."

"And the Jew, Van?"

"He is in another room with Imp, sir."

"Get him and come along," and Bert Brandon led the way to the wharf, entered the boat he had hired and was rowed down the harbor to a point a hundred feet from the cottage where Brewster Talbot was hiding.

"Come," said the skipper and he was followed by all, the Jew going too, alarmed and wondering.

A rap at the door caused it to be opened by an elderly lady, and as the room was revealed Brewster Talbot was seen within, seated at a table reading, while a young man with one arm was smoking a pipe as he lay upon a sofa.

"Pardon me, lady, but I wish to see that gentleman," said Bert Brandon, and he strode quickly into the room and cried sternly:

"Brewster Talbot, you are my prisoner!"

The guilty man uttered a cry and started to his feet, but in an instant he was seized and overpowered, irons being clasped upon his wrists.

"What means this outrage, Bert Brandon?" cried Talbot.

"Yes, sir, what does this outrage mean?" and the young host confronted the skipper, who replied coolly:

"Do not get excited, sir, for it will do you no good, as I have authority to arrest this man as a conspirator to cause my death by hanging, under the false charge of piracy."

"Madam, I regret to have caused this scene in your house, but we will depart now, and free your roof of a villain," and Bert Brandon led the way out, followed by his men with their prisoner.

"Now, Brewster Talbot, do you know this man?" he asked, pointing to the Jew, as they reached the boat.

The new moon shone brightly upon the Jew, and Talbot started, but he answered:

"I never saw him before."

"I vas see you, mine fri'nt, for I tells all, and t'e pizziness vas all over mit."

"Then give me back my money, you infernal Jew!" hissed the culprit.

"I keep t'e monish, for t'e goots vas confiscated to t'e crown for birate goots."

"The goods are on the wharf, sir, and a worthless lot, so you will take them back tomorrow, and return the money to me, and I will see that it goes back to the one who gave it to you, Brewster Talbot, and you know who that is."

"As for you, Talbot, I could place you in prison if so I willed; but for the sake of your people in Bath, I simply force you to leave the country, and here is a document stating that you can return only under penalty of death."

"Now, sir, I shall take you to the British corvette that sails for India to-morrow, and you are to serve the king as a foremost hand, and you have reason to congratulate yourself that your punishment is no worse."

"One question, Bert Talbot."

"Was I betrayed by—"

"You were simply caught in your own trap, sir, for I have known for some time of your plot to destroy me."

"Come, utter another word, and I will have you gagged."

"You will let me go to the inn for my traps?"

"I have them here for you in the boat."

"Now no more," and half an hour after, Brewster Talbot was in irons on board the corvette, which the next day set sail for India.

CHAPTER XLIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE day after he ran down his foes, Bert Brandon had his lugger returned to him by Major Shackelford, and received from the Jew the money paid him by Brewster Talbot, and which, I may as well here say, he returned to Hettie Lynn, for she had furnished it all to carry out her revenge against the young skipper who had refused her love.

Hardly had the corvette, carrying Brewster Talbot as a foremost hand to far-away India, gotten hull down, when a carriage drove up to Castle Wyndom.

From it sprang four persons, three of them in brilliant uniforms, and the fourth being in the attire of a civilian.

They were Captain Delafield, Major Shackelford, Lieutenant Neal Nelson and Bert Brandon, whom the secretary had invited to dine with him that day.

If the party had expected to find the young sailor awkward as a guest in a grand house, they were mistaken, for he was as courtly as the others, and as self-possessed.

Observing two very handsome portraits in the dining-room, Bert Brandon asked:

"May I inquire, without seeming rude, Mr. Wyndom, who the originals of those portraits are?"

"They are the parents of my wife, who you may not know was an English noble lady, the daughter of Lord Langdon, and sister of Lady Lulu's father."

"Pardon me, sir, but my father is an Englishman, and he has miniature likenesses set in gold, the exact counterparts of those portraits, and now I notice the coat-of-arms upon the frame, the same is upon the case of the miniatures of which I speak."

"Indeed! this is strange," said the secretary.

"What is your father's name, Mr. Brandon?" quickly asked Lady Lulu.

"Loyd Brandon, Lady Lulu."

"Uncle, do you remember that father had a younger brother, who was educated for the church, but being forced into a duel, killed, as he believed, his adversary, and left England, going no one knew where?"

"Yes, Lulu, and his name was Brandon Loyd Langdon!" cried the secretary, and Bert Brandon had at once to tell all he knew regarding the history of his father.

When he concluded, the secretary said excitedly:

"As sure as I live, Brandon, you are Lulu's cousin, and we will at once go to Maine and find if your truant father is not the young curate, Brandon Loyd Langdon, who avenged an insult with his sword, though he did not, as he supposed, killed his insulter, who is now alive, I believe."

"I will gladly offer my lugger, sir, if you will accept of my hospitality for the cruise to the Kennebec," said Bert Brandon.

"Indeed we will, and be glad of a cruise on the famous Gantlet-Runner, and you will go too, gentlemen?" and the secretary turned to his officer guests.

Neal Nelson and Major Shackelford promptly accepted, while Captain Delafield was forced to decline, as he had to start upon a cruise in a few days.

The next day the Mermaid Bessie was put in the best of trim, the secretary sent ample extra stores aboard, in the way of delicacies, and the fleet vessel sailed down the harbor in broad daylight, the war-ships saluting as she went by, and also the fort, in honor of her gallant achievements, as well as the fact that the secretary was on board.

It was remarked over and over again, as they swept by the castle, how daring must be the man that would tempt such a gantlet of death as running by, and Bert Brandon became still greater a hero in the eyes of Lady Lulu.

After a pleasant run the Mermaid Bessie dropped anchor in the cove, and all were welcomed to The Nook, when Captain Brandon could no longer deny his identity, and confessed that he was the curate, Brandon Loyd Langdon, who, believing his enemy dead, had come to America to live.

It was a joyful meeting all around, and during the days spent at The Nook, three love-matches were made: Madge Wyndom pledging herself to Major Shackelford, Bessie Brandon promising one day to become the wife of Neal Nelson, while the young skipper won the love of his beautiful cousin, Lady Lulu, whom he had saved from becoming a pirate's bride.

THE END.

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